Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies

FARHAD DAFTARY

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The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The Institute of Ismaili Studies was established in 1977 with the object of promoting scholarship and learning on Islam, in the historical as well as contemporary contexts, and a better understanding of its relationship with other societies and faiths.

The Institute's programmes encourage a perspective which is not confined to the theological and religious heritage of Islam, but seeks to explore the relationship of religious ideas to broader dimensions of society and culture. The programmes thus encourage an interdisciplinary approach to the materials of Islamic history and thought. Particular attention is also given to issues of modernity that arise as Muslims seek to relate their heritage to the contemporary situation.

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The Institute's academic publications fall into a number of interrelated categories:

1. Occasional papers or essays addressing broad themes of the relationship between religion and society, with special reference to Islam.
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5. Works on Ismaili history and thought, and the relationship of the Ismailis to other traditions, communities and schools of thought in Islam.
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This book falls into category five listed above.

In facilitating these and other publications, the Institute's sole aim is to encourage original research and analysis of relevant issues. While every effort is made to ensure that the publications are of a high academic standard, there is naturally bound to be a diversity of views, ideas and interpretations. As such, the opinions expressed in these publications must be understood as belonging to their authors alone.

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Preface

My interest in Ismaili studies dates back to the mid-1960s when I was studying for my doctorate at the University of California in Berkeley. It was Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1970), the Russian pioneer in modern Ismaili studies, who encouraged me to choose Ismailism as a field of study. More than a decade later, after I had conducted much research in this field and in the turbulent years following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, I started to write a comprehensive Ismaili history, which at the time still did not exist. It took me another decade to complete that book which was subsequently published as *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990) with a Foreword by Professor W. Madelung who closely followed the progress of this research project. Meanwhile, in 1988 I had joined The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, whose library possesses the largest collection of Ismaili manuscripts in the West, and where I have acted as general editor of two major series of publications in Ismaili studies, namely 'Ismaili Heritage Series' and 'Ismaili Texts and Translations Series', whilst also responsible for other academic activities.

In 1998, I published another book, *A Short History of the Ismailis* (Edinburgh, 1998), reflecting a further attempt to synthesize the results of modern scholarship in Ismaili studies focusing on a number of major topical themes, institutions and intellectual traditions in Ismaili history. This book has been translated into numerous European languages as well as Arabic, Persian, Gujarati and Urdu.

The progress in modern Ismaili studies, commenced in the 1930s, has been truly astonishing. Numerous Ismaili texts have now been edited, analysed and published and some three generations of

scholars have made original contributions to this relatively new field of Islamic studies. I attempted to take stock of the various aspects of modern scholarship in Ismailism in my recently published *Ismaili Literature* (London, 2004). At any rate, fact is increasingly replacing fiction in our perception and understanding of Ismailism, that for a millennium had provided a fertile ground for fanciful myths rooted in hostility or ignorance.

This volume brings together, and makes more readily accessible, a collection of ten studies on Ismaili history and thought which I published previously, between 1992 and 2001, in various academic journals or collective volumes. The chapter 'Ismailis and Ismaili Studies' appears here for the first time. Another article relevant to the subject matter of this volume, 'The Earliest Isma'ilis', *Arabica*, 38 (1991), pp. 214–245, was not included here, since it has already been reprinted in E. Kohlberg, ed., *Shi'ism* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 235–266. However, that article and all other chapters of this volume have also appeared in Russian translation in a volume entitled *Traditsii ismailitov v srednie veka* [The Ismaili Traditions in Medieval Times] (Moscow, 2005). I would like to express my gratitude to Kutub Kassam for his editorial work and to Nadia Holmes for meticulously preparing the earlier drafts of this volume.

F.D.
March 2005

Note on the Text

As the essays collected here appeared in the form of independent articles or chapters in edited volumes over several years, I have taken the opportunity of reprinting them to delete as much as justifiable certain introductory materials that may appear repetitive, and also revising them where necessary. However, such revisions and updating of the notes have been kept to a minimum. The collection of these essays in one volume has also necessitated the reorganization of certain materials as well as standardization of the systems of transliteration and referencing; diacriticals have been omitted throughout the text of the volume, except for those respresenting *ayn* and selectively *hamza*. Also, terms such as amir and imam, which have become part of the English lexicon, have not been transliterated.

In reprinting the essays of this volume, the permission of the following publishers is gratefully acknowledged:

Gale Research Inc., Detroit, MI, for 'Diversity in Islam: Communities of Interpretation', in Azim A. Nanji, ed., *The Muslim Almanac* (1996), pp. 161–173.

G.P. Maisonneuve-Larose, Paris, for 'A Major Schism in the Early Ismā'īlī Movement', *Studia Islamica*, 77 (1993), pp. 123–139.

St. Martin's Press, New York, for 'Sayyida Ḥurra: The Ismā'īlī Ṣulayḥid Queen of Yemen', in Gavin R.G. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World* (1998), pp. 117–130.

The British Institute of Persian Studies, London, for 'Persian Historiography of the Early Nizārī Ismā'īlīs', *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 30 (1992), pp. 91–97.

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, for 'Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ and the Origins of the Nizārī Ismʿaili Movement', *Mediaeval Ismaʿili History and Thought* (1996), pp. 181–204.

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Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, for 'The Ismaʿilis and the Crusaders: History and Myth', Z. Hunyadi and J. Laszlovszky, ed., *The Crusaders and the Military Orders: Expanding the Frontiers of Medieval Latin Christianity* (2001), pp. 21–41.

Oneworld Publications, Oxford, for 'Ismāʿīlī-Sufi Relations in Early Post-Alamūt and Safavid Persia', in L. Lewisohn and D. Morgan, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism:* Volume III, *Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501–1750) – The Safavid and Mughal Period* (1999), pp. 275–289.

IB Tauris Publishers, London, for 'Intellectual Life among the Ismailis: An Overview', in F. Daftary, ed., *Intellectual Traditions in Islam* (2000), pp. 87–111.

Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Paris, for 'The Ismaili *Daʿwa* outside the Fatimid *Dawla*', in M. Barrucand, ed., *L'Egypte Fatimide, son art et son histoire* (1999), pp. 29–43.

The following abbreviations have been used for certain periodicals and encyclopaedias cited frequently in the Notes and Select Bibliography:

BSO(A)S	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies*
EI2	*The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New edition
EIR	*Encyclopaedia Iranica*
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle East Studies*
JBBRAS	*Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
NS	New Series

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Diversity in Islam

Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad after a brief illness in the year 632, the nascent Islamic community (*umma*) was confronted with its first major crisis over the succession to the Prophet.* As a result, the hitherto unified Muslim community was soon split into its two major divisions or distinct communities of interpretation, designated subsequently as Sunni and Shiʿa. In time, the Sunnis and Shiʿis themselves were subdivided into a number of smaller communities and groupings with particular theological and legal doctrines that evolved gradually over several centuries. In addition to the Sunnis and the Shiʿa, other communities of interpretation in the form of religio-political movements or schools of thought began to appear among the early Muslims during this formative period. Most of these early movements proved short-lived, although several of them left lasting influences on the teachings of the surviving communities and shaped important aspects of Islamic thought. The Kharijis or Khawarij, a religio-political community of the first Islamic century who were opposed to both the Shiʿa and the Sunnis, have survived to the present times, and as such they are generally considered as Islam's third major division. Other important movements of the early Islamic times, such as the Murji'a who originated in response to the harsh stances of the Khawarij and who adopted a more compromising position regarding other Muslim communities, did not survive long under their own names. There were other more famous contemporary theological schools, such as the Muʿtazila and Maturidism, which disappeared in medieval times after leaving permanent imprints on aspects of Shiʿi and Sunni theology.

Modern scholarship indicates that the early Muslims lived, especially during the first three centuries of their history, in an intellectually dynamic milieu characterized by a multiplicity of communities, schools of thought and stances on major religio-political issues of the time. On a political level, which remained closely linked to religious perspectives and theological considerations, the diversity in early Islam ranged widely from the viewpoints of those (later designated as Sunnis) who endorsed the historical caliphate to the various oppositional groups (notably the Shiʿa and the Khawarij) who aspired toward the establishment of new orders. In this fluid and intellectually effervescent atmosphere in which ordinary individuals as well as scholars and theorists often moved freely among different communities, Muslims engaged in lively discourses revolving around a host of issues that were of vital significance to the emerging Muslim *umma*. At the time, the Muslims were confronted by many gaps in their religious knowledge and teachings related to issues such as the attributes of God, the source and nature of authority, and the definitions of true believers and sinners. It was under such circumstances that different religious communities and schools of thought formulated their doctrines in stages and acquired their own identities as well as designations that often encapsulated central aspects of their beliefs and practices.

The Sunni Muslims of medieval times, or more specifically their religious scholars (*ʿulama*), painted a normative picture of early Islam that is at variance with the findings of modern scholarship on the subject. According to the Sunnis, who have always regarded themselves as the true custodians and interpreters of the faith, Islam from early on represented a monolithic community with a well-established doctrinal basis from which various groups then deviated and went astray. Sunni Islam was thus portrayed by its adherents as the 'true Islam', while all non-Sunni communities of the Muslims, especially the Shiʿa among them who had allegedly deviated from the right path, were accused of 'heresy' (*ilhad*) or even irreligiosity. It is interesting to note that the same highly distorted perceptions and biased classifications came to be adopted in the nineteenth century by the European orientalists who had then begun their 'scientific' study of Islam on the basis of Muslim sources of different genres

produced mainly by Sunni authors. Consequently, they too endorsed the normativeness of Sunnism and distinguished it from Shiʿism, or any non-Sunni interpretation of Islam, with the use of terms such as 'orthodoxy' and 'heterodoxy', terms grounded in the Christian experience and inappropriate in an Islamic context. The Shiʿa, too, presented their own idealized model of the 'true Islam' based on a particular interpretation of early Islamic history and a distinctive conception of religious authority vested in the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*). The Shiʿa, whose medieval scholars (like the Sunni ones) did not generally recognize the process of doctrinal evolution, have also disagreed among themselves regarding the identity of the rightful imams or spiritual leaders of the community. As a result, the Shiʿi Muslims themselves have in the course of their history subdivided into a number of major communities and minor groupings, each possessing an idealized self-image and rationalizing its own legitimacy to the exclusion of other communities.

In short, almost every Muslim community, major or minor in terms of the size of its membership, has developed its own self-image and retrospective perceptions of its earlier history. In such a milieu, characterized by diversity and competing communal claims and interpretations, the idea of 'true Islam' defied a universally acceptable definition, although the designation of 'heresy' was utilized more readily in reference to certain minority groups. Such definitions were usually adopted by the religious scholars of particular states, scholars who performed the important function of legitimizing the established regimes and refuting their political opponents in return for enjoying privileged social positions among the elite of the society. This is why the perception of 'true Islam' depicted as 'official Islam' and the 'law of the land' has varied so widely over time and space, and manifested itself in the various schools of Sunnism of the Abbasid caliphate, Kharijism of the North African states and ʿUman, Ismaili Shiʿism of the Fatimid caliphate, Nizari Ismaili Shiʿism of the Alamut state, Mustaʿlian Ismaili Shiʿism of the Sulayhid state in Yaman, Zaydi Shiʿism of the territorial states in Yaman and northern Iran, and the Ithnaʿashari or Twelver Shiʿism of Safawid and post-Safawid Iran. Several versions of the so-called 'true Islam' existed concurrently in different regions of the Muslim world for about two centuries when

the Shiʿi Fatimids and the Sunni Abbasids, each ruling over vast territories, were diligently competing with one another for winning the allegiance of the Muslims at large. Under such circumstances, different communities were singled out in different states for the status of 'heterodoxy' or 'heresy' depending on the religious toleration of the various regimes as well as the religio-political strengths and prospects of the communities not associated with the ruling regime and its legitimizing *ʿulama* of jurists and theologians.

It is important to emphasize at this juncture that many of the fundamental disagreements between Sunnis, Shiʿis and other Muslims, as well as the less pronounced differences among the factions of any particular Muslim community, will probably never be satisfactorily explained by modern scholarship because of a lack of reliable sources, especially from early Islam. As is well known, extensive written records dealing with these issues among Muslims have not survived from the first two centuries of Islam, while the later writings produced by historians, theologians and others display their own 'sectarian' biases. Any critical study of the formative period of Islam and its tradition of diversity would be severely hampered by important gaps in our knowledge of early Islam and the biases of the available literature produced later by different Muslim communities.

Diversity in Islam is abundantly attested to in the heresiographical literature of the Muslims. The authors of such heresiographies, which were supposedly written to explain the internal divisions of Islam, had one major preoccupation: to prove the legitimacy of the particular community to which the author belonged while refuting and condemning other communities as heretical. However, the heresiographers used the term *firqa* (plural, *firaq*), meaning sect, rather loosely and indiscriminately in reference to a major community, a smaller independent group, a sub-group, a school of thought, or even a minor doctrinal position. As a result, heresiographers, who in a sense gave wide currency to the notion of 'sectarianism', exaggerated the number of Islamic 'sects' in their writings. This may have partly resulted from their misinterpretation of a *hadith* or Tradition reported from the Prophet. According to this *hadith*, the Prophet had said that 'the Jews are divided into 71 sects, and the Christians are divided into 72 sects; and my people will be divided into 73 sects;

all of them are destined to hellfire except one, and these are the true believers.' This *hadith*, as first pointed out by the famous orientalist I. Goldziher (1850–1921), had evidently come into existence as a result of a misunderstanding of a somewhat similar saying, which is included in the major compendia of the Prophetic Traditions. Ultimately, most heresiographers have arranged their accounts of the Muslim sects so as to adhere to a paradigmatic scheme of some 72 heretical sects, with the author's community depicted as the 'saved sect.' At any rate, the famous Muslim heresiographers of the medieval times, such as al-Ashʿari (d. 935–36), al-Baghdadi (d. 1037), and Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), who were devout Sunnis, and al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), the Ashʿari theologian who may have been an Ismaili, as well as the earliest Shiʿi heresiographers al-Nawbakhti (d. after 912) and al-Qummi (died 913–14), were much better informed about the teachings of different Muslim communities, which they aimed to refute. As a result, despite their shortcomings and distortions, these heresiographies continue to provide an important source of information for the study of diversity in medieval Islam. It is within such a frame of reference that we shall now present an overview of the major Muslim communities, especially those appearing during the formative period of Islam.

The origins of Sunnism and Shiʿism may be traced to the crisis of succession in the Islamic community, then centred in Medina, following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. In accordance with the message of Islam that Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets (*khatim al-anbiya*), he could not be succeeded by another prophet. However, a successor was needed to assume Muhammad's functions as leader of the Islamic community and state, ensuring the continued unity of the Muslims under a single leader. According to the Sunni view, the Prophet had not designated a successor, and so this important appointment had to be made. After some heated debate among the leading Muslim groups, including the Companions of the Prophet from among the Meccan Emigrants (*Muhajirun*) and his Medinese Helpers (*Ansar*), the communal choice fell upon Abu Bakr, who became *khalifat rasul Allah*, Successor to the Messenger of Allah. This title was soon simplified to *khalifa*, from which the word caliph in Western languages originates. By electing the first successor to the Prophet, the Muslims had founded the unique Islamic institution of

the caliphate. The precise nature of the authority of Abu Bakr and his immediate successors during the earliest decades of Islamic history remains obscure, and modern scholarship is just beginning to take a more analytical look at the nature of caliphal authority in early Islam. It is clear, however, that from its inception the historical caliphate embodied not only aspects of the political but also the religious leadership of the community, while different groups gradually formulated various conceptions of the caliph's religio-political authority and his moral responsibility toward the community.

Abu Bakr led the Muslims for just over two years (632–634,); and the next two heads of the Muslim community, ʿUmar (634–644) and ʿUthman (644–656), were also installed to the caliphate by various elective procedures. These three early caliphs all belonged to the influential Meccan tribe of Quraysh and they were also among the early converts to Islam and the Companions of the Prophet who had accompanied Muhammad on his historic journey from Mecca to Medina in 622. Only the fourth caliph, ʿAli b. Abi Talib (656–661), who occupies a unique position in the annals of Shiʿism, belonged to the Banu Hashim, the Prophet's own clan of Quraysh. ʿAli b. Abi Talib was also closely related to the Prophet, being his cousin and son-in-law, and bound by marriage to the Prophet's daughter Fatima.

The Early Shiʿa

Upon the death of the Prophet there appeared a small group in Medina who believed that ʿAli was better qualified than any other candidate to succeed the Prophet. This minority group, originally comprised of some of ʿAli's friends and supporters, in time expanded and came to be generally designated as the *shiʿat ʿAli*, Party of ʿAli, or simply as the Shiʿa. It is the fundamental belief of the Shiʿa, including the major communities of Ithnaʿashariyya, Ismaʿiliyya and Zaydiyya, that the Prophet had designated a successor or an imam as the Shiʿa have preferred to call the leader of the Muslim community. On the basis of specific Qur'anic verses and certain *hadith*s, the Shiʿa have maintained that the Prophet designated ʿAli as his successor; a designation or *nass* that had been instituted through divine revelation. ʿAli himself was firmly convinced of the legitimacy of his own claim

to Muhammad's succession based on his close kinship and association with him, his intimate knowledge of Islam as well as his early merits in the cause of Islam. Thus, from early on the Shiʿa believed that the succession to the Prophet was the legitimate right of ʿAli. This contention was, however, not accepted by the Muslim majority who supported the caliphate of Abu Bakr and refused to concede that the Prophet had designated a successor. In fact, they had chosen to refer the decision of the caliphate to the *ijmaʿ* or consensus of the community. ʿAli's partisans were obliged to protest against the act of choosing the Prophet's successor through elective methods. According to the Shiʿa, it was this very protest that separated them from the rest of the Muslims.

Indeed, the Shiʿa came to hold a particular conception of religious authority that was eventually developed in terms of the central Shiʿi doctrine of the imamate. According to the Shiʿi sources, the followers of ʿAli believed that the most important issue facing the Muslim community after the Prophet's death was the elucidation of Islamic teachings. This was because they were aware that the Qurʾan and the revealed law of Islam *(shariʿa*) had emanated from sources beyond the comprehension of ordinary men. Hence, they believed the Islamic message contained inner truths that could not be understood directly through human reason. In order to understand the true meaning of the Islamic revelation, the Shiʿa had recognized the need for a religiously authoritative teacher and guide, the imam. According to this view, the possibility of a Shiʿi interpretation existed within the very message of Islam, and this possibility was merely actualized in Shiʿism.

The Shiʿa, then, adhered to their own distinctive conception of authority and leadership in the community. While the majority who endorsed the historical caliphate came to consider the caliph as the administrator and guardian of the *shariʿa* and leader of the community, the Shiʿa, in addition, saw in the succession to the Prophet an important spiritual function. As a result, the successor also had to possess legitimate authority for elucidating the teachings of Islam and for providing spiritual guidance for the Muslims. According to the Shiʿa, a person with such qualifications could belong only to the *ahl al-bayt*, eventually defined to include only certain members of

the Prophet's immediate family, notably ʿAli and Fatima and their progeny. It seems that ʿAli was from the beginning considered by his devoted partisans as the most prominent member of the Prophet's family, and as such, he was believed to have inherited the true understanding of the Prophet's teachings and religious knowledge or *ʿilm*. According to the Shiʿa, ʿAli's unique qualifications as successor to the Prophet held another dimension in that he was believed to have been designated by divine command. This meant that ʿAli was also divinely inspired and immune from error and sin (*maʿsum*), making him infallible both in his knowledge and as an authoritative teacher or imam after the Prophet. In sum, it was the Shiʿi view that the two ends of governing the community and exercising religious authority could be discharged only by ʿAli.

This Shiʿi point of view on the origins of Shiʿism contains some elements that cannot be entirely attributed to the early Shiʿa, especially the original partisans of ʿAli. At any rate, emphasizing hereditary attributes of the individuals and the imam's kinship to the Prophet as a prerequisite for possessing the required religious knowledge, the Shiʿa later also held that after ʿAli, the leadership of the Muslim community was the exclusive right of certain direct descendants of ʿAli, the ʿAlids, who belonged to the *ahl al-bayt* and possessed the required religious authority. The earliest Shiʿi currents of thought developed gradually, finding their full formulation and consolidation in the doctrine of the imamate, expounded in its fundamental form at the time of Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (d. 765).

Pro-ʿAlid sentiments and Shiʿism remained in a more or less dormant state during the earliest Islamic decades. But Shiʿi aspirations were revived during the caliphate of ʿUthman, which initiated a period of strife and civil war in the community. Diverse grievances against ʿUthman's policies finally erupted into open rebellion, culminating in the murder of the caliph in Medina in 656 at the hands of rebel contingents from the provinces. In the aftermath of this murder, the Islamic community became divided over the question of ʿUthman's behaviour as a basis for justification of the rebels' action, and soon the disagreements found expression in terms of broad theoretical discussions revolving around the question of the rightful leadership, caliphate or imamate, in the Muslim community. Matters

came to a head in the caliphate of ʿAli, who had succeeded ʿUthman. ʿAli's caliphal authority was challenged by Muʿawiya, the powerful governor of Syria and leader of a pro-ʿUthman party. As a member of the influential Banu Umayya and a relative of ʿUthman, Muʿawiya found the call for avenging the slain caliph a suitable pretext for establishing Umayyad rule.

It was under such circumstances that the forces of ʿAli and Muʿawiya met at Siffin on the upper Euphrates in the spring of 657. The events of Siffin, the most controversial battle in early Islam, in which ʿAli's forces seemed to prevail, was followed by a Syrian arbitration proposal. ʿAli's acceptance of it and the resulting arbitration verdict issued sometime later, all had critical consequences for the early Muslim community. It was also during this prolonged conflict that different groups seceded from ʿAli's forces, the seceders being subsequently designated as the Khawarij or Kharijis. During the last two years of the civil war, ʿAli rapidly lost political ground to Muʿawiya. Soon after ʿAli's murder, at the hand of a Khariji in 661, Muʿawiya was recognized as the new de-facto caliph by the majority of the Muslims, except for the Shiʿa and the Khawarij. Muʿawiya also succeeded in founding the Umayyad caliphate that ruled the Islamic state on a dynastic basis for nearly a century (661–750).

The Muslims emerged from their first civil war severely tested and split into factions or parties that differed in their interpretation of the rightful leadership of the community and the caliph's moral responsibility. These factions, which began to acquire definite shape in the aftermath of the murder of ʿUthman and the battle of Siffin, gradually developed their doctrinal positions and acquired distinct identities as differing communities of interpretation. They also continued to confront each other in theological discourses as well as on the battlefield throughout the Umayyad dynasty and later times. These parties acquired denominations that revealed their personal loyalties. The upholders of ʿUthman as a just caliph, commonly designated as ʿUthmaniyya, had accepted the verdict of the arbitrators appointed at Siffin and held that ʿUthman had been murdered unjustly. Consequently, they repudiated the rebellion against ʿUthman and the resulting caliphate of ʿAli. In addition to the partisans of Muʿawiya, the ʿUthmaniyya included the upholders of the principles of the early

caliphate, namely the rights of the non-Hashimid early Companions of the Prophet to the caliphate. The partisans of ʿAli, the *shiʿat ʿAli*, who now also referred to themselves as the *shiʿat ahl al-bayt* or its equivalent *shiʿat al Muhammad* (Party of the Prophet's Household), upheld the justice of the rebellion against ʿUthman who, according to them, had invalidated his rule by his unjust acts. Repudiating the claims of Muʿawiya to leadership as the avenger of ʿUthman, they now aimed to re-establish rightful leadership or imamate in the community through the Hashimids, members of the Prophet's clan of Banu Hashim, and notably through ʿAli's sons. However, the support of the *ahl al-bayt* by the Shiʿa at this time did not as yet imply a repudiation of the first two caliphs.

The Khawarij

The Khawarij, who originally seceded in different waves from Ali's Kufan army in opposition to his arbitration agreement with Muʿawiya after the battle of Siffin, shared the view of the Shiʿa concerning ʿUthman and the rebellion against him. They upheld the initial legitimacy of ʿAli's caliphate but repudiated him from the time of his agreeing to the arbitration of his conflict with Muʿawiya. They also repudiated Muʿawiya for having rebelled against ʿAli when his caliphate was still legitimate. The Khawarij were strictly uncompromising in their interpretation of the theocratic principle of Islam expressed in their slogan 'judgement belongs to God alone'. Even caliphs, according to them, were to submit unconditionally to this principle as embodied in the Qurʾan. If caliphs failed to observe this rule, then they were to repent or be removed from the caliphate by force despite any valuable services they might have rendered to Islam. This is why they equally condemned ʿUthman and ʿAli, and also dissociated themselves from Muʿawiya who had unjustly challenged ʿAli's legitimate caliphate.

The Khawarij posed fundamental questions concerning the definitions of a true believer, the Muslim community, its rightful leader and the basis for the leader's authority. As a result, they contributed significantly to doctrinal disputations in the Muslim community. The Khawarij adhered to strict Islamic egalitarianism, maintaining that every meritorious Muslim of any ethnic origin,

Arab or non-Arab, could be chosen through popular election as the legitimate leader of the community. They aimed to establish a form of 'Islamic democracy' in which leadership and authority could not be based on tribal and hereditary considerations, or on any other attributes of individuals other than religious piety. They also had a strong communal spirit, regarding their community as the only 'saved community'. However, it was not mere membership in the Khariji community but strict adherence to religious tenets and conduct, covering both faith and works, that defined the status of a believer and guaranteed his salvation. Rejecting the doctrine of justification by faith without works propounded later by other Muslim communities, the Khawarij professed a form of radical puritanism or moral austerity and readily considered anyone, even the caliph, as an apostate, if in their view he had slightly deviated from the right conduct. By committing a minor sin, a believer could thus become irrevocably an unbeliever deserving of dissociation and even execution. The Khariji insistence on right conduct, and the lack of any institutional form of authority among them, proved highly detrimental to the unity of their movement, characterized from early on by extreme factionalism. Heresiographers name a multitude of Khariji 'sects', most of which were continuously engaged in insurrectionary activities, especially in the eastern provinces of Islam where they controlled extensive territories in Iran for long periods.

The Azariqa represented the most radical community among the Khawarij. They considered as polytheists (*mushrikun*) and infidels (*kuffar*) all non-Kharijis and even those Kharijis who had not joined their camp. They held the killing of these 'sinners', who could never re-enter the faith, along with their wives and children, licit. The Azariqa established several communities in different parts of Iran. Later, Ibn ʿAjarrad, who may have been from Balkh, founded the ʿAjarida branch of Kharijism. Heresiographers name some fifteen groups of the ʿAjarida who were specific to eastern Iran and were more moderate in their views and policies than the Azariqa. The most moderate Khariji community was represented by the Ibadiyya, today the sole survivors of the Khawarij. The Ibadis considered the non-Ibadi Muslims, as well as the sinners of their own community, not as polytheists but merely as 'infidels by ingratitude', and, as such,

it was forbidden to kill or capture them in peacetime. In general, the Ibadis were more reluctant than other Kharijis to take up arms against other Muslims. In contrast, they were deeply engaged in the study of religious sciences and made important early contributions to the elaboration of legal and theological doctrines in Islam.

The Emergence of Early Shiʿi Communities: The Kaysaniyya and the Imamiyya

The early Shiʿa, a small and zealous opposition party centred in Kufa in southern Iraq, survived ʿAli's murder and numerous subsequent tragic events during the Umayyad period. Upon ʿAli's death, the Shiʿa recognized his eldest son al-Hasan as their new imam. Meanwhile, al-Hasan had also been acclaimed as caliph in succession to ʿAli in Kufa, ʿAli's former capital. However, Muʿawiya speedily succeeded in compelling al-Hasan to abdicate from the caliphate. Shiʿism remained subdued under al-Hasan who refrained from any political activity. On al-Hasan's death in 669, the Shiʿa revived their aspirations for restoring the caliphate to the ʿAlids, now headed by their next imam, al-Husayn, the second son of ʿAli and Fatima. The Shiʿa persistently invited al-Husayn to their midst in Kufa to launch a rising against the Umayyads, who were considered by them as usurpers of the caliphate. The tragic martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, al-Husayn, and his small band of relatives and companions at Karbala, near Kufa, where they were brutally massacred by an Umayyad army in 680, played an important role in the consolidation of the Shiʿi ethos, leading to the formation of radical trends among the partisans of ʿAli and the *ahl al-bayt*. The earliest of such radical trends, which left lasting marks on Shiʿism, became manifest a few years later in the movement of al-Mukhtar.

Al-Mukhtar organized his own Shiʿi movement with a general call for avenging al-Husayn's murder in the name of Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya, ʿAli's third son and al-Husayn's half-brother. Of much greater significance was al-Mukhtar's proclamation of this Muhammad as the Mahdi, 'the divinely guided one', the messianic saviour-imam and the restorer of true Islam who would establish justice on earth and deliver the oppressed from tyranny. This new

eschatological concept of the Imam-Mahdi was a very important doctrinal innovation, proving particularly appealing to the *mawali*, the non-Arab converts to Islam who, under the Umayyads, represented a large intermediary class between the Arab Muslims and the non-Muslim subjects of the Islamic state. The *mawali*, comprised of Aramean, Persian and other non-Arab Muslims, constituted second-class citizens in comparison to Arab Muslims. As a large and underprivileged social class concentrated in urban milieus and aspiring for the establishment of a state and society that would observe the egalitarian teachings of Islam, the *mawali* provided a valuable recruiting ground for any movement opposed to the exclusively Arab hegemony of the Umayyads. The *mawali* did, in fact, join the Khawarij and participated in many Khariji revolts. Above all, they became involved in Shiʿism, starting with the movement of al-Mukhtar. By attempting to remove their grievances and through the appeal of the idea of the Mahdi, al-Mukhtar easily succeeded in drawing the *mawali* to his movement. They now began to call themselves the *shiʿat al-mahdi,* 'Party of the Mahdi'. Al-Mukhtar speedily won control of Kufa in an open revolt in 685. The success of al-Mukhtar proved short-lived, but his movement survived his demise in 687 and Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya's death in 700, and it continued under the general name of Kaysaniyya. This name, like many other community names, was coined by the heresiographers.

The Kaysaniyya elaborated some of the doctrines that came to distinguish the radical wing of Shiʿism. For instance, they condemned the first three caliphs before ʿAli as illegitimate usurpers and also held that the community had gone astray by accepting their rule. They considered ʿAli and his three sons, al-Hasan, al-Husayn and Muhammad, as their four imams, successors to the Prophet, who had been divinely appointed and were endowed with supernatural attributes. Many such ideas, first developed by different Kaysani groups, were subsequently adopted by other Shiʿi communities. This explains why most Shiʿi groups in time came to accuse the majority of the early Companions of the Prophet of apostasy, which also led to the general Shiʿi vilification (*sabb*) of the first three caliphs. Meanwhile, the ʿUthmaniyya had adopted their own anti-Shiʿa policies, such as the cursing of ʿAli from the pulpits after Friday prayers, a policy

instituted by Muʿawiya. Many of the ʿAlids and their partisans from different Shiʿi groups were also continuously persecuted on the orders of the Umayyads and their officials in Iraq and elsewhere.

It was in the aftermath of the Shiʿi revolt of al-Mukhtar that the religio-political movement known as Murjiʾa appeared in Kufa, advocating a return to unity among the Muslims by refuting all extreme partisan views concerning the caliphate. The early Murjiʾa held that judgement of the conduct of ʿUthman and ʿAli should be deferred (*irjaʾ*) to Allah, while the caliphates of Abu Bakr and ʿUmar deserved praise and emulation. The early Murjiʾa thus distanced themselves from the radical Shiʿis, who now repudiated the first three caliphs, from the Khawarij who condemned both ʿUthman and ʿAli, and from the ʿUthmaniyya who condemned ʿAli. In general, the Murjiʾa held that Muslims should not fight one another except in self-defence. The sources name Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya's son al-Hasan as the original author of the doctrine of *irjaʾ*, a Qurʾanic term meaning 'to defer judgement.' The movement of the Murjiʾa soon spread to Khurasan and Transoxania, where it became particularly identified with the cause of the *mawali*. The Murjiʾa campaigned for the equality of the Arab and non-Arab Muslims, and the exemption from paying the special poll tax (*jizya*) levied on non-Muslim subjects of the Muslim state. In that context, the Murjiʾa advocated the identity of faith (*iman*) with belief and confession of Islam to the exclusion of obligatory acts, namely the performance of the ritual and legal obligations of Islam. This meant that the legal status of a Muslim and of a true believer could not be denied to those new, non-Arab converts on the pretext that they ignored or failed to perform some of the essential duties of the Muslims. In time, the Murjiʾa, too, split into several groups, some developing close relations with certain Sunni schools of law and theology.

From the time of al-Mukhtar's movement, different Shiʿi communities and groups, consisting of Arabs and *mawali*, had come to coexist, each one having its own imam and developing its own teachings, and individuals moved rather freely from one Shiʿi community to another. Furthermore, the Shiʿi imams now issued not only from the three major branches of the extended ʿAlid family – the Husaynids (descendants of al-Husayn b. ʿAli), the Hanafids (descendants of

Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya) and, later, the Hasanids (descendants of al-Hasan b. ʿAli) – but also from other branches of the Prophet's clan of Banu Hashim, such as the Abbasids. This was because the Prophet's family, whose sanctity was supreme for the Shiʿa, was then still defined broadly in its old tribal sense. It was later, after the accession of the Abbasids, that the Shiʿa began to define the *ahl al-bayt* more restrictively to include only the descendants of the Prophet through Fatima and ʿAli, known as the Fatimids (covering both the Hasanid and the Husaynid ʿAlids), while the bulk of the non-Zaydi Shiʿis came to acknowledge a particular Husaynid line of imams. At any rate, during this second phase in the formative period of Shiʿism, the Shiʿa did not accord general recognition to any single line of imams, from which various dissident groups would diverge in favour of alternative claimants to the imamate.

In this fluid and confusing setting, Shiʿism developed in terms of two main branches or trends. Later, another ʿAlid movement led to the formation of yet another Shiʿi community known as the Zaydiyya. A radical branch, in terms of both doctrine and policy, evolved out of al-Mukhtar's movement and accounted for the allegiance of the bulk of the Shiʿa until shortly after the Abbasid revolution. This branch, breaking away from the religiously moderate attitudes of the early Kufan Shiʿa and generally designated as the Kaysaniyya by the heresiographers, was comprised of a number of interrelated groups recognizing various Hanafid ʿAlids and other Hashimids as their imams. By the end of the Umayyad period, the majority body of the Kaysaniyya, namely the Hashimiyya, transferred their allegiance to the Abbasid family. With this transference, the Abbasids also inherited the party and the *daʿwa* or missionary organization, which became the main instruments for the eventual success of the Abbasid revolution.

The various Kaysani communities drew mainly on the support of the superficially Islamicized *mawali* in southern Iraq and elsewhere. The *mawali*, drawing on diverse pre-Islamic traditions, played an important part in transforming Shiʿism from an Arab party of limited size and doctrinal basis to a dynamic movement. The Kaysani Shiʿis elaborated some of the beliefs that came to characterize the radical branch of Shiʿism. Many of the Kaysani doctrines were propounded by the so-called *ghulat*, 'exaggerators', who were accused by the more

moderate Shiʿis of later times of exaggeration (*ghuluww*) in religious matters. In addition to their condemnation of the early caliphs preceding ʿAli, the most common feature of the earliest ideas propagated by the Shiʿi *ghulat* was the attribution of superhuman qualities to the imams. The early *ghulat* speculated rather freely on a host of issues and they were responsible for many doctrinal innovations, including the spiritual interpretations of the Day of Judgement, Resurrection, Paradise and Hell. They also held a cyclical view of the religious history of mankind in terms of eras initiated by different prophets. The Shiʿi *ghulat* speculated on the nature of God, often with tendencies toward anthropomorphism (*tashbih*). Many of them believed in the independence of the soul from the body, allowing for *tanasukh* or transmigration of the soul from one body to another.

The Shiʿi *ghulat*, like other contemporary Muslims, also concerned themselves with the status of the true believer. Emphasizing the acknowledgement of and the obedience to the rightful Shiʿi imam of the time as the most essential religious obligation of the true believer, the role of the developing *shariʿa* became less important for these radical Shiʿis. These *ghulat* seem to have regarded the particular details and ritual prescriptions of the religious law, such as prayer and fasting, as not binding on those who knew and were devoted to the true imam from the *ahl al-bayt*. Consequently, they were often accused of advocating that faith alone was necessary for salvation, and of tolerating libertinism. Much of the intellectual heritage of the Kaysaniyya was later absorbed into the teachings of the main Shiʿi communities of the early Abbasid times. Politically, too, the Kaysaniyya pursued an activist policy, condemning Abu Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthman as well as the Umayyads as usurpers of the rights of ʿAli and his descendants, aiming to restore the caliphate to the ʿAlids. As a result, several Kaysani groups, led by their various *ghulat* theorists, engaged in revolutionary activities against the Umayyad regime, especially in or around Kufa, the cradle of Shiʿism. However, as all these Shiʿi revolts were poorly organized and their scenes were too close to the centres of caliphal power, they proved abortive.

In the meantime, there had appeared a second major branch or wing of Shiʿism, later designated as the Imamiyya. This branch, with its limited initial following, remained completely removed from any

anti-regime political activity. The Imami Shiʿis, who, like other Shiʿis of the time, were centred in Kufa, recognized a line of ʿAlid imams after ʿAli, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, tracing the imamate through al-Husayn's sole surviving son ʿAli b. al-Husayn, who received the honorific epithet of Zayn al-ʿAbidin, 'the Ornament of the Pious.' It was through Zayn al-ʿAbidin's son and successor as imam, Muhammad al-Baqir, that the Husaynid imams and Imami community began to acquire their particular identity and prominence within Shiʿism. Al-Baqir refrained from any political activity and concerned himself solely with the religious aspects of his authority, developing the rudiments of some of the ideas that were to become the legitimist principles of the Imamiyya. Above all, he seems to have concerned himself with explaining the functions and attributes of the imams. During the final Umayyad decades, with the rise of different theological and legal schools upholding conflicting views, many Shiʿis sought the guidance of their imams as an authoritative teacher. Al-Baqir was the first imam of the Husaynid line to openly perform this role, and he acquired an increasing number of followers who regarded him as the sole legitimate religious authority of the time. In line with his quiescent policy, al-Baqir is also credited with introducing the important Shiʿi principle of *taqiyya*, precautionary disguising of one's true religious belief in the face of danger. This principle was later adopted by the Ithnaʿashari and Ismaili Shiʿi communities, and it particularly served to save the Ismailis from much persecution throughout their history.

It may be pointed out at this juncture that al-Baqir's imamate also coincided with the initial stages of the Islamic science of jurisprudence (*ʿilm al-fiqh*). It was, however, in the final decades of the second Islamic century that the old Arabian concept of *sunna*, the normative custom of the community that had reasserted itself under Islam, came to be explicitly identified with the *sunna* of the Prophet. This identification necessitated the collection of *hadith*s or Traditions, claimed reports of the sayings and actions of the Prophet, transmitted orally through an uninterrupted chain of trustworthy authorities. The activity of collecting and studying *hadith* for citing the authority of the Prophet to determine proper legal practices soon became a major field of Islamic learning, complementing the science

of Islamic jurisprudence. In this formative period of the Islamic religious sciences, al-Baqir has been mentioned as a reporter of *hadith*, particularly of those supporting the Shiʿi cause and derived from ʿAli. However, the imam al-Baqir and his successor Jaʿfar al-Sadiq interpreted the law mostly on their own authority without much recourse to *hadith* from earlier authorities. It should be added that in Shiʿism, *hadith* is reported on the authority of the imams and it includes their sayings in addition to the Prophetic Traditions. Having laid the foundations of the Imami branch of Shiʿism, the common heritage of the Shiʿi communities of Ithnaʿashariyya and Ismaʿiliyya, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir died around 732, a century after the death of the Prophet. It was during the long imamate of al-Baqir's son and successor Jaʿfar al-Sadiq that the Shiʿi movement of his uncle Zayd b. ʿAli unfolded, leading eventually to the separate Zaydi community of Shiʿism.

The Zaydis and the Imamis under Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq

Few details are available on the ideas propagated by Zayd and his original associates. Similar to the Khawarij, Zayd seems to have emphasized the need for a just imam and the community's obligation to remove an unjust leader. He paid particular attention to the Islamic principle of 'commanding the good and prohibiting the evil' (*al-amr bi'l-maʿruf wa'l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*). He is also reported to have taught that if an imam wanted to be recognized, he had to assert his rights publicly, with sword in hand if required. In other words, Zayd did not attach any significance to hereditary succession to the imamate, nor was he prepared to accept the eschatological idea of the occultation (*ghayba*) and return (*rajʿa*) of an Imam-Mahdi, an idea propagated by different Kaysani and, later, Imami groups. Thus, the Zaydis originally maintained that the imamate might legitimately be held by any member of the *ahl al-bayt*, though later restricting it only to the Hasanid and Husaynid ʿAlids. Unlike other Shiʿis, they did not consider the imams as divinely protected from error and sin either. The claimant to the imamate had to possess the required religious learning. He would also have to be capable of launching an uprising (*khuruj*), as Zayd himself was to do, against the illegitimate

ruler of the time. Accordingly, there could be long periods without a legitimate Zaydi imam.

Zayd realized that in order to achieve success in combating the Umayyads, he would need the support of a large body of the Muslims. It was to this end, and reflecting the moderate stances of the early Kufan Shiʿa, that Zayd made an important doctrinal compromise. He asserted that although ʿAli was the most excellent (*al-afdal*) person for succeeding the Prophet, the allegiance given by the early Muslims to Abu Bakr and ʿUmar who were less excellent (*al-mafdul*) was, nevertheless, valid. This view was, however, repudiated by the later Zaydis. Zayd's recognition of the rule of the first two caliphs won him the general sympathy of all those Muslims upholding the unity of the Muslim community. At any rate, Zayd's movement survived his abortive Kufan revolt of 740. Henceforth, the Zaydis retained their moderate views in the doctrinal field. Not only did they adopt conservative stances in elaborating the religious status of their imams, but they also continued to refrain from condemning the early caliphs before ʿAli and the rest of the Muslim community for having failed to support the legitimate rights of ʿAli and his descendants. Politically, the Zaydis maintained their militant position, advocating insurrections against the illegitimate rulers of the time. Led by different ʿAlid imams after Zayd, the Zaydis succeeded by the second half of the ninth century to establish two territorial states, one in Yaman and another one in the Caspian region of northern Iran. In time, the Zaydis became subdivided into several communities.

The Imamiyya expanded significantly and became an important religious community during the long and eventful imamate of al-Baqir's son and successor Jaʿfar al-Sadiq, the foremost scholar and teacher among the Husaynid imams. This happened particularly after the victory of the Abbasids whose *daʿwa* had been in the name of the *ahl al-bayt* largely on a Shiʿi basis, but, after supplanting the Umayyads in 750, they installed their own dynasty to the caliphate to the great disappointment of the Shiʿa who had all along expected the ʿAlids to accede to the leadership of the Muslim community. Shiʿi disillusionment was further felt when the Abbasids, soon after their victory, adopted repressive measures against the ʿAlids and their Shiʿi supporters. In the meantime, the Kaysani Shiʿism of the Umayyad

times had largely aborted in the Abbasid cause. It was under such circumstances that Jaʿfar al-Sadiq emerged as the main rallying point for the allegiance of the Shiʿa.

Maintaining the Imami tradition of remaining aloof from any revolutionary activity, Jaʿfar al-Sadiq had gradually acquired a widespread reputation as a religious scholar and teacher, and besides his own partisans, large numbers of Muslims studied or consulted with him, including Abu Hanifa al-Nuʿman (d. 767) and Malik b. Anas (d. 795), the famous jurists and eponymous founders of the Sunni Hanafi and Maliki schools of law. In time, al-Sadiq also acquired a noteworthy circle of Imami thinkers and associates that included some of the most learned scholars and theologians of the time, such as Hisham b. al-Hakam (d. 795), the foremost representative of Imami *kalam* or scholastic theology. As a result of the intense intellectual activities of Imam al-Sadiq and his associates, the Imamiyya now came to possess a distinctive legal school together with a body of ritual and theological thought.

The central doctrine of Imami thought, however, has been the doctrine of the imamate, which was elaborated in al-Sadiq's time. This doctrine, essentially retained by the later Ithnaʿashari and Ismaili Shiʿis, was based on the belief in the permanent need of mankind for a divinely guided, sinless and infallible (*maʿsum*) leader or imam who, after the Prophet Muhammad, would act as the authoritative teacher and guide of Muslims in all their religious and spiritual affairs. The imam can practise *taqiyya*, and although he is entitled to temporal leadership as much as to religious authority, his mandate does not depend on his actual political rule or any attempt at gaining it. It was further maintained that the Prophet himself had designated ʿAli b. Abi Talib as his *wasi*, or legatee, by an explicit designation (*nass*), under divine command. After ʿAli, the imamate was to be transmitted from father to son by *nass*, among the descendants of ʿAli and Fatima, and after al-Husayn, in the Husaynid line until the end of time. This imam is endowed by God with special knowledge or *ʿilm*, and has perfect understanding of the exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*) aspects and meanings of the Qur'an and the message of Islam. Indeed, the world could not exist for a moment without such an imam, the proof of God (*hujjat Allah*) on earth. Even if only two men were left

upon the face of the earth, one of them would be the imam as there can only be a single imam at any one time. The recognition of the true imam and obedience to him were made the absolute duty of every believer, while the ignorance or rejection of such an imam would be tantamount to infidelity. Having consolidated Shiʿism and laid a solid foundation for its subsequent doctrinal development, Jaʿfar al-Sadiq, the last imam recognized by both the Ithnaʿasharis and the Ismailis, died in 765. The dispute over his succession led to permanent divisions in the Imami Shiʿa community.

The Ithnaʿashari and Ismaili Shiʿis

On Jaʿfar al-Sadiq's death, the Imami Shiʿa split into several groups. A large number recognized al-Sadiq's eldest surviving son ʿAbd Allah al-Aftah as their imam. These Shiʿis, known as Fathiyya, maintained some prominence until the tenth century. When ʿAbd Allah died shortly after his father, however, the bulk of his supporters went over to his half-brother Musa al-Kazim who had already been acknowledged as his father's successor by a faction of the Imamiyya. Musa, later counted as the seventh imam of the Ithnaʿasharis, refrained from all political activity, an Imami tradition retained by his successors. On Musa's death in 799, one group of his partisans acknowledged the imamate of his eldest son ʿAli b. Musa al-Rida, later becoming the heir-apparent of the Abbasid caliph al-Maʾmun who had attempted a temporary rapprochement with the ʿAlids. When ʿAli al-Rida died in 818, most of his followers traced the imamate through four more imams, while others followed different ʿAlid imams. At any rate, it was this sub-group of the Imamiyya that eventually became known as the Ithnaʿashariyya, or the Twelvers. This title refers to all those Imami Shiʿis who recognized a line of twelve imams, starting with ʿAli b. Abi Talib and ending with Muhammad b. al-Hasan whose emergence as the Mahdi has been awaited since his occultation (*ghayba)* in 873. Twelver Shiʿism has remained the 'official' religion of Iran since 1501.

In the meantime, two other groups split from the Imami Shiʿis, supporting Ismaʿil b. Jaʿfar, the original designated successor of Imam al-Sadiq, on al-Sadiq's death. These Kufan-based groups may

be identified as the earliest Ismailis who were soon organized into a rapidly expanding, revolutionary movement representing the most politically active wing of Shiʿism. By the middle of the ninth century, the Ismaili *daʿwa* or religio-political mission had begun to appear in many regions of the Muslim world. The Shiʿi message of this *daʿwa,* based on an anti-Abbasid campaign and the promise of justice under the rule of the Ismaili imam, was successfully preached by numerous *daʿi*s or missionaries in Iraq, Yaman, Iran, Central Asia and elsewhere, appealing to different strata of the society.

By 899, the Ismaili imams, who had hitherto led the movement secretly from different headquarters, emerged from their underground existence. It was around that time that a faction of the Ismaili community, later designated as Qarmati, disagreed with the central leadership of the movement over certain doctrinal issues and seceded. The Qarmati dissidents, who soon founded a powerful state of their own in Bahrayn, eastern Arabia, engaged in prolonged devastating activities against the loyal Ismailis and other Muslims. The ravaging activities of the Qarmatis, culminating in their attack on Mecca in 930, were capitalized on by the Muslim enemies of the Ismailis in order to discredit the entire Ismaili movement.

The success of the early Ismaili *daʿwa* was crowned in 909 by the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate (909–1171) in North Africa, under the direct leadership of the Ismaili imams who traced their ancestry to ʿAli and the Prophet's daughter Fatima. The Fatimid caliph imams, who had successfully challenged the legitimacy of the Abbasids, now became ready targets for the polemical attacks of the Abbasids and their legitimizing *ʿulama.* In later times, the Ismailis themselves became subdivided into a number of major communities and minor groupings. A particular state centred at the mountain fortress of Alamut with territories in Iran and Syria was founded in the 1090s by the leaders of the Nizari branch of Ismailism. Currently, the bulk of the Ismailis of the world, who belong to the majority Nizari branch, recognize as their hereditary forty-ninth present and living Imam His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan.

The Muʿtazila

Meanwhile, by the late Umayyad decades, yet another religious movement had gained prominence in the Muslim community. This was the movement of the Muʿtazila, the defenders of human rationality, that arose in Basra with the aim of reuniting the Muslims on a compromise solution of the disputes among the various religio-political parties. The early Muʿtazilis were, however, mainly theologians who focused their attention on theological principles with a side interest in the issues related to the rightful leadership in the community.

In agreement with the Khariji position, the Muʿtazilis emphasized the need for a just imam and the community's obligation to remove an unjust one. They were, however, opposed to the Khariji condemnation of ʿUthman and ʿAli and their partisans as infidels. In fact, they preferred to suspend the ultimate judgement on all the parties involved in these conflicts. They supported some of the Umayyad and early Abbasid caliphs while refuting others. Indeed, for several decades until 848, Muʿtazilism was the official doctrine of the Abbasid court. However, by the latter decades of the ninth century, Muʿtazilism had become increasingly pro-ʿAlid, and its theological doctrines left permanent influences on Zaydi, Imami Ithnaʿashari and Ismaili Shiʿism.

Emphasizing rationalism, in the sense that a certain awareness is accessible to man by means of his intelligence alone in the absence of or in addition to any revelation, the early Muʿtazilis became known for five principles on which they had reached a consensus of opinion. These principles, with a number of related theological issues, included the unity of God (*tawhid*) and the divine attributes, the justice of God (ʿ*adl*), and the theory of an intermediate state (*al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn*), according to which a sinful Muslim cannot be classified either as a believer (*mu'min*) or an infidel (*kafir*) but belongs to a separate intermediate category. Acknowledged as a major school of theology in early Islam, Muʿtazilism began to lose its prominence during the tenth century to other theological schools, notably Ashʿarism and Maturidism.

The Ahl al-Sunna (Sunnis)

By the early Abbasid times, as noted, there had also appeared distinctive schools of law, such as the Hanafi and Maliki, named after their jurist-founders, at the same time that Shiʿi and Khariji communities were developing their own legal doctrines. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate the evolution of these legal schools and the early history of the various theological movements of the Abbasid times, including particularly the two most important schools of Sunni *kalam* founded by Abu'l-Hasan al-Ashʿari (d. 935–36) and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 944). We have also refrained from considering the organized Sufi orders that later developed their own mystical interpretations of Islam and the spiritual path (*tariqa*) to 'truth', transcending Sunni-Shiʿi-Khariji divisions. Nor have we dealt with the inquiries of the *falasifa*, the Muslim philosophers who formulated highly complex metaphysical systems drawing on different Hellenistic traditions and the teachings of Islam. Nonetheless, our survey attests sufficiently to the prevalence of pluralism in early Islam, which was characterized by a diversity of communities, movements, and schools of interpretation, none having had any monopoly over the sole interpretation of the Islamic message.

Within this perspective, it is also important to bear in mind that by the second Islamic century, there was no single community representing even what eventually became the Sunni interpretation of Islam. It was over the course of several centuries that the majority of Muslims came to think of themselves as the *ahl al-sunna*, People of the *sunna*, or simply as the Sunnis. This designation was used not because the majority were more attached than others to the *sunna* or practice of the Prophet, but because they claimed to be the adherents to the correct Prophetic Traditions, also upholding the unity of the community. Different currents of what later became identified as Sunni Islam were elaborated gradually, as in the case of Shiʿism and other interpretations of Islam. For instance, Sunni doctrine on the imamate drew on the ideas of the earlier 'Uthmaniyya and the Murji'a, aiming to defend the historical caliphate against the threats posed by the claims of the Shiʿa and other opposition movements. However, the Sunnis too differed among themselves on theological and legal

doctrines. On the matter of defining faith, for instance, there developed two opposing views in the Sunni camp. One group, associated with the Hanafi school of law and supported by the Maturidi school of theology, essentially defined faith as knowledge to the exclusion of acts. According to the other view, upheld by the Hanbali school of law and Ashʿari theology, and also reflected in the canonical collections of Sunni *hadith*, faith would also require the inclusion of acts. This latter view has also become known as Sunni traditionalism. In contrast, the Shafiʿi school of law, unlike Hanafism and Hanbalism, was essentially a legal school without strong interests in theological doctrines. In fact, the bulk of the early Shafiʿis were opposed to speculative reasoning used by the Muslim theologians. There were numerous other disagreements within every legal or theological school of thought associated with Sunni Islam. However, Maturidism, which became prevalent in Sunni Islam after the disappearance of Muʿtazilism, in broad terms provided the common theology of the Hanafis, while Ashʿarism eventually became the dominant theology of the Shafiʿis and Malikis. While it is difficult to speak of 'orthodoxy' even within Sunnism, the emergence of a powerful class of religious scholars or *ʿulama* in the Abbasid state from around the middle of the ninth century led to a consolidated Sunni group; and their doctrines were elaborated by the same 'Sunni' *ʿulama* who had now come to possess religious authority under the aegis of the state.

One aspect of the definition of Muslim belief undertaken by Sunni scholars was the articulation of statements that constituted a creed. Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Hanafi school of Sunni law, and other major figures such as al-Ashʿari, al-Shafiʿi (d. 820) and al-Ghazali (d. 1111) further elaborated and consolidated this process of systematizing belief. Some of the key elements of these creeds emphasized particular perspectives on understanding the foundational beliefs common to all Muslims. Al-Ashʿari, for example, emphasized belief in the Qur'an as Allah's uncreated Word (in contrast to the beliefs of the Muʿtazila); he acknowledged the pre-eminent status of the Companions of the Prophet, without discriminating among them, but giving priority to the first four caliphs; he emphasized the idea of *sunna*, authenticated on the basis of authoritative claims of transmission related from acknowledged transmitters and constituting a consensus of Sunni

scholars; and lastly, he decried 'innovations' in matters of belief and practice. Such creedal statements, combined with the role of the Sunni scholars and jurists as custodians and interpreters of the faith, developed into a broad synthesis to which the composite term Sunni came to be applied. The major Sunni schools of law agreed on the principle that Muslim tradition and practice were best preserved through a legal and theological methodology founded on the collective consensus and interpretation of the learned scholars and jurists of the earlier period. The authoritative role and shared sense of purpose was integrated into the larger workings of the state so that the major ruling Sunni dynasties incorporated them into the structure of the state, endowing them with a role and a status in matters of governance and daily life. Sunni scholars and institutions of learning thus played a major role in mediating political authority and the role of the *shari'a* in Muslim society.

The phenomenon of diversity and pluralism that characterized the early centuries of Islam continues down to our own times. The linking of specific Muslim interpretations to an ideological basis, however, is still pertinent to understanding how political hegemony determines the validity of any one particular interpretation of Islam, and whether the category of the diversity of communities of interpretation might not be a more important umbrella for understanding the worldwide *umma*.

Notes

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2

The Ismailis and Ismaili Studies

The Ismailis represent the second largest Shiʿi Muslim community after the Twelver Shiʿis or Ithnaʿasharis, and are today scattered as a religious minority in more than twenty-five countries of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and North America. The Ismailis have had a complex history dating back to the formative period of Islam; and in the course of their long history they have split into a number of major branches and minor groups. The two major branches, the Mustaʿli-Tayyibi and Nizari Ismailis, became respectively known in South Asia as Bohras and Khojas. The Nizari Ismailis currently recognize His Highness the Aga Khan as their 49th imam or spiritual leader while since 524/1130 the imams of the Mustaʿli-Tayyibis have remained in concealment and in their absence they have been led by lines of *daʿi*s or representatives with supreme authority.

The Imami Shiʿis split into Ismailis and other Shiʿi groups on the death of Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq in 148/765, and by the middle of the 3rd/9th century, the Ismailis had organized a secret, revolutionary mission or *daʿwa*, one of whose aims was to uproot the established Sunni order led by the Abbasids and their *ʿulama* or religious scholars. The message of this movement was disseminated by *daʿi*s or religio-political propagandists who were soon active from North Africa to Yaman, Syria, Persia and Central Asia. The early success of the Ismaili movement culminated in 297/909 in the establishment of an Ismaili state, the Fatimid caliphate, under the leadership of the Ismaili imams. The Ismailis, who as Imami Shiʿis had developed their own interpretation of Islam, had now in effect openly offered a viable alternative to Sunni 'orthodoxy'. The Fatimid period can be regarded,

in a certain sense, as the 'golden age' of Ismailism when the Ismaili imam ruled over a major empire and medieval Ismaili thought and literature attained their summit.[1] It was during this period that the Ismaili *daʿi*s who were at the same time the scholars and authors of their community elaborated a diversity of intellectual and literary traditions, including the science of *taʾwil* or esoteric exegesis which became the hallmark of Ismaili thought. By the second half of the 5th/11th century, the Ismailis had made important contributions to Islamic thought and culture.

In 487/1094, on the death of Imam al-Mustansir biʾllah who had ruled as the eighth Fatimid caliph (427–487/1036–1094), the Ismaili community experienced a permanent schism. Al-Mustansir's succession was disputed between his eldest son and heir-designate Nizar and his youngest son who was installed to the Fatimid caliphate with the title of al-Mustaʿli biʾllah. Subsequently, Nizar rose in revolt to assert his claims, but he was defeated and executed in 488/1095. As a result of these events, the unified Ismaili community and *daʿwa* were split into two rival branches, later designated as Mustaʿli and Nizari. The Mustaʿli Ismailis themselves split into Hafizi and Tayyibi factions soon after the death of al-Mustaʿli's son and successor al-Amir in 524/1130. The Mustaʿli-Hafizi Ismailis, who recognized al-Hafiz (524–544/1130–1149) and the later Fatimid caliphs as their imams, disappeared after the collapse of the Fatimid dynasty in 567/1171 when Egypt returned to the fold of Sunni Islam under Saladin. On the other hand, the Mustaʿli-Tayyibi Ismailis, who have not had any manifest imam after al-Amir's son al-Tayyib, survived in their permanent strongholds in Yaman under the initial support of the Sulayhid dynasty there. The Tayyibis were henceforth led by their *daʿi*s. Subsequently, the Tayyibis themselves split into Daʾudi and Sulaymani factions and a number of minor groups. In general, the Tayyibi Ismailis maintained the intellectual and literary traditions of the Fatimid Ismailis as well as a good share of the Ismaili literature of that period. Numbering around one million adherents, the Mustaʿli-Tayyibis account for a minority of the Ismailis of the world today.

The Nizari Ismailis have experienced a completely different history, while elaborating their own distinctive religious traditions under the leadership of their imams. Initially led by the *daʿi* Hasan-i

Sabbah (d. 518/1124), Nizari Ismailis acquired political prominence within Saljuq dominions. In fact Hasan founded the Nizari state, centred at the fortress of Alamut with territories scattered in Persia and Syria, as well as the independent Nizari *daʿwa*. The Nizari state lasted some 166 years until it collapsed under the onslaught of the Mongols in 654/1256. Preoccupied with their protracted struggle against the Saljuqs and other enemies and constantly living in hostile surroundings, the Nizari *daʿi*s and leaders were for the most part military commanders and governors of mountainous fortresses rather than theologians as in Fatimid times. Consequently, they did not produce a substantial religious literature. Nevertheless, the Nizaris too did maintain a literary tradition and also elaborated their teachings in response to changing circumstances of the Alamut period (483–654/1090–1256) in their turbulent history.[2]

Although a large number of Nizari Ismailis perished in the Mongol invasions, many survived and gradually reorganized their community. This represented the beginning of a new phase in their history, which was characterized by the strict observance of *taqiyya* or precautionary dissimulation under different external guises. In the aftermath of the Mongol invasions, the Nizari imams went into hiding and the scattered Nizari communities of Syria, Persia, Central Asia and India developed independently under their local leaders. At the same time, many Nizari groups of Persia and adjacent lands adopted Sufi, Sunni or Twelver Shiʿi guises to safeguard themselves against persecution. By the middle of the 9th/15th century, the Nizari imams established their headquarters in the village of Anjudan, in central Persia, initiating the so-called Anjudan revival in Nizari *daʿwa* and literary activities. The Nizari *daʿwa* now achieved particular success in Badakhshan, Central Asia, and on the Indian subcontinent where large numbers of Hindus were converted in Sind and Gujarat and became locally known as Khojas. The Nizari Ismailis of Central Asia also preserved the bulk of the extant Persian Ismaili literature of the Alamut and later periods, in addition to the authentic and spurious works of Nasir-i Khusraw (d. after 462/1070), the famous Persian poet and the only *daʿi* of the Fatimid times who produced all his works in Persian. In the 1840s, the seat of the Nizari Ismaili imamate was transferred from Persia to India, and subsequently to Europe, thus

commencing the modern period in the history of the Nizari Ismailis. Benefiting from the modernizing policies and the elaborate network of institutions established by their last two imams, known internationally by their hereditary title of the Aga Khan, the Nizaris who number several millions have emerged as an educated and prosperous Muslim minority.

Ismaili historiography and the perceptions of the Ismailis by others, in both Muslim and Christian milieus, have had their own fascinating evolution. In the course of their long history the Ismailis have often been accused of various heretical teachings and practices and, at the same time, a multitude of myths and misconceptions circulated about them. This state of affairs reflected mainly the fact that the Ismailis were, until the middle of the twentieth century, studied and judged almost exclusively on the basis of evidence collected or often fabricated by their enemies. As the most revolutionary wing of Shiʿism with a religio-political agenda that aimed to uproot the Abbasids and restore the caliphate to a line of ʿAlid imams, the Ismailis from early on aroused the hostility of the Sunni establishment of the Muslim majority. With the foundation of the Fatimid state, the Ismaili challenge to the established order had become actualized, and thereupon the Abbasid caliphs and the Sunni *ʿulama* launched what amounted to a widespread and official anti-Ismaili propaganda campaign. The overall objective of this systematic and prolonged campaign was to discredit the entire Ismaili movement from its origins so that the Ismailis could be readily condemned as *malahida*, heretics or deviators from the true religious path.

Sunni polemicists, starting with Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad b. ʿAli b. Rizam, better known as Ibn Rizam, who lived in Baghdad during the first half of the 4th/10th century, now began to fabricate evidence that would lend support to the condemnation of the Ismailis on specific doctrinal grounds. The polemicists cleverly concocted detailed accounts of the sinister teachings and practices of the Ismailis while refuting the ʿAlid genealogy of their imams as descendants of Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq. Anti-Ismaili polemical writings provided a major source of information for Sunni heresiographers, such as al-Baghdadi (d. 429/1037), who produced another important category of writing against the Ismailis.[3] A number of polemicists also fabricated

travesties in which they attributed a variety of objectionable beliefs and practices to the Ismailis; and these forgeries circulated as genuine Ismaili treatises and were used as source materials by subsequent generations of polemicists and heresiographers. One of these forgeries, the anonymous *Kitab al-siyasa* (*Book of Methodology*), acquired wide popularity as it contained all the ideas needed to condemn the Ismailis as heretics on account of their libertinism and atheism. This book, which has survived only fragmentarily in later Sunni sources and was partially reconstructed by Samuel M. Stern,[4] is reported to have candidly expounded the intricate procedures used by Ismaili *da'i*s for winning new converts and instructing them through some seven stages of initiation leading ultimately to unbelief and atheism. Needless to note that the Ismaili tradition knows of these fictitious accounts only through the polemics of its enemies. Be that as it may, the polemical and heresiographical works, in turn, influenced the Muslim historians, theologians and jurists who had something to say about the Ismailis.

The Sunni authors who were generally not interested in collecting accurate information on the internal divisions of Shi'ism and treated all Shi'i interpretations of Islam as 'heterodoxies' or even 'heresies', also readily availed themselves of the opportunity of blaming the Fatimids and indeed the entire Ismaili community for the atrocities perpetrated by the Qarmatis of Bahrayn. The Qarmatis seceded from the rest of the Ismaili movement in 286/899 and never recognized continuity in the imamate which was the central doctrine of the Fatimid Ismailis. At any rate, the dissemination of hostile accounts and misrepresentations contributed significantly to turning other Muslims against the Ismailis. By spreading defamations and forged accounts, the anti-Ismaili authors, in fact, produced a 'black legend' in the course of the 4th/10th century. Ismailism was now depicted as the arch-heresy of Islam, carefully designed by a certain non-'Alid called 'Abd Allah b. Maymun al-Qaddah or some other impostor, possibly even a Jewish magician disguised as a Muslim, aiming at destroying Islam from within. Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1970), the Russian pioneer of modern Ismaili studies, investigated this 'black legend' in a number of works.[5] By the 5th/11th century, this anti-Ismaili fiction, with elaborate details and its seven stages of initiation, had been

astonishingly successful throughout the central Islamic lands; and as such it had been accepted as an accurate description of Ismaili motives, beliefs and practices, further intensifying the animosity of other Muslims towards the Ismailis.

The revolt of the Persian Ismailis led by Hasan-i Sabbah against the Saljuq Turks, the new overlords of the Abbasids, called forth another vigorous Sunni reaction against the Ismailis in general and the Nizari Ismailis in particular. The new literary campaign, accompanied by sustained military attacks on Alamut and other Nizari strongholds in Persia, was initiated by Nizam al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), the all-powerful Saljuq vizier who devoted a long chapter in his *Siyasat-nama* (*The Book of Government*) to the condemnation of the Ismailis who, according to him, aimed 'to abolish Islam, to mislead mankind and cast them into perdition'.[6] This was followed by several anti-Ismaili tracts written by al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), the most renowned contemporary Sunni theologian and jurist. He was, in fact, commissioned by the Abbasid caliph al-Mustazhir (487–512/1094–1118) to write a major treatise in refutation of the Batinis – another designation meaning 'esotericists' coined for the Ismailis by their enemies who accused them of dispensing with the *zahir*, or the commandments and prohibitions of the *shari'a,* because they claimed to have found access to the *batin*, or the inner meaning of the Islamic message as interpreted by the Ismaili imam. In this widely circulating book, known as *al-Mustazhiri*, al-Ghazali fabricated his own elaborate 'Ismaili system' of graded initiation leading to the ultimate stage of atheism.[7] Al-Ghazali's defamations were adopted by other Sunni authors who were familiar with the earlier 'black legend' as well. The Sunni authors, including especially Saljuq chroniclers, actively participated in the renewed propaganda campaign against the Ismailis while Saljuq armies consistently failed to dislodge the Nizaris from their strongholds.

Soon the Ismailis found a new enemy in the Christian Crusaders who had arrived in the Holy Land to liberate their own co-religionists. The Crusaders seized Jerusalem, their primary target, in 492/1099 and subsequently engaged in extensive military and diplomatic encounters with the Fatimids in Egypt and the Nizari Ismailis in Syria, with lasting consequences in terms of the distorted image of the Nizaris

in Europe. The Syrian Nizaris attained the peak of their power and fame under the leadership of Rashid al-Din Sinan, their chief *da'i* for three decades until his death in 589/1193. It was in the time of Sinan, the original 'Old Man of the Mountain' of the Crusader sources, that occidental chroniclers of the Crusades and a number of European travellers and diplomatic emissaries began to write about the Nizari Ismailis designated by them as the 'Assassins'. The very term Assassin, evidently based on the variants of the Arabic word *hashishi* (plural, *hashishiyya*) that was applied to the Nizari Ismailis in the derogatory sense of 'irreligious social outcast' by other Muslims, was picked up locally in the Levant by the Crusaders and their European observers who remained completely ignorant of Islam and the Ismailis despite their proximity to Muslims. It was under such circumstances that the Frankish circles themselves began to fabricate and put into circulation both in the Latin Orient and in Europe a number of tales about the secret practices of the Ismailis, also using *hashishi* in its literal sense of the designation for a person taking hashish, a product of hemp. It is important to note that none of the variants of these tales are to be found in contemporary Muslim sources, including the most hostile ones written during the 6th–7th/12th–13th centuries.

The Crusaders were particularly impressed by the highly exaggerated reports and rumours of the assassinations and daring behaviour of the Nizari *fida'i*s, self-sacrificing devotees who carried out targeted missions in public places and normally lost their own lives in the process. It should be noted that in the 6th/12th century, almost any assassination of any significance committed in the central Islamic lands was readily attributed to the Nizaris. This explains why these imaginative tales came to revolve around the recruitment and training of their *fida'i*s; for they were meant to provide satisfactory explanations for behaviour that would otherwise seem puzzling to the medieval European mind. These so-called Assassin legends, consisting of a number of interconnected tales including the 'hashish legend', the 'paradise legend' and the 'death-leap legend', developed in stages and finally culminated in a synthesis popularized by Marco Polo (d. 1324).[8] The Venetian traveller added his own fictional contribution in the form of a 'secret garden of paradise', where bodily pleasures were supposedly procured for the *fida'i*s with the aid of hashish by their

mischievous leader, the 'Old Man of the Mountain', as part of their indoctrination and training.[9]

Marco Polo's version of the Assassin legends, offered as a report obtained from reliable contemporary sources in Persia, was reiterated to various degrees by subsequent European writers, such as Odoric of Pordenone (d. 1331), as standard description of the early Nizari Ismailis of Persia and Syria. Strangely, it did not occur to any European that Marco Polo might have actually heard the tales in Italy after returning to Venice in 1295 from his journeys to the East – tales that were by then rather widespread in Europe and could already be at least partially traced to European antecedents on the subject – not to mention the possibility that the Assassin legends found in Marco Polo's travelogue may have been entirely inserted, as a digressionary note, by Rustichello of Pisa, the Italian romance writer who was actually responsible for committing the account of Marco Polo's travels to writing. It may also be added that Marco Polo himself evidently revised his travelogue during the last decades of his life, at which time he could readily have appropriated the legends regarding the Syrian Nizaris then current in Europe. In fact, it was Marco Polo himself who transferred the scene of the Assassin legends from Syria to Persia. The contemporary Persian historian, 'Ata-Malik Juwayni (d. 681/1283), an avowed enemy of the Nizaris who accompanied the Mongol conqueror Hulagu to Alamut in 654/1256 and personally inspected that fortress and its renowned library before their destruction by the Mongols, does not report discovering any 'secret garden of paradise' there, as claimed in Marco Polo's account. By the 8th/14th century, the Assassin legends had acquired wide currency and were accepted as reliable descriptions of secret Nizari Ismaili practices, in much the same way as the earlier 'black legend' of the Sunni polemicists had been accepted as accurate explanation of Ismaili motives, teachings and practices. Henceforth, the Nizari Ismailis were portrayed in late medieval European sources as a sinister order of drugged assassins bent on indiscriminate murder and terrorism.

Soon, the very term 'assassin' had acquired the meaning of professional murderer in European languages, a new noun with a forgotten etymology. Henceforth, a number of European philologists and lexicographers began to collect variants of the term 'assassin', such

as *assassini* and *hessessini,* occurring in medieval occidental sources, also proposing many strange etymologies. By the 12th/18th century, numerous explanations of this term had become available, while the Ismailis had received a few more notices from the travellers and missionaries to the East. Indeed, by the beginning of the 19th century, Europeans still perceived the Ismailis in an utterly confused and fanciful manner.[10] The orientalists of that time, led by A. I. Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838) who also finally explained correctly the etymology of the name 'Assassin',[11] began their more scholarly study of Islam on the basis of Arabic manuscripts which were written mainly by Sunni authors with their anti-Ismaili biases. As a result, they studied Islam according to the Sunni perspective and, borrowing classifications from Christian contexts, treated Shi'ism and Ismailism as 'heterodox' interpretations of Islam, or even as heresies, by contrast to Sunnism which was taken to represent Islamic 'orthodoxy'. It was mainly on this basis, as well as the continued attraction of the seminal Assassin legends, that the orientalists launched their own studies of the Ismailis. Although the orientalists correctly identified the Ismailis as a Shi'i Muslim community, they were still obliged to study them exclusively on the basis of the hostile Sunni sources and the fictitious occidental accounts of the Crusader circles rooted in their 'imaginative ignorance'. Consequently, the orientalists, too, tacitly lent their seal of approval to the myths of the Ismailis, namely, the anti-Ismaili 'black legend' of the medieval Sunni polemicists and the Assassin legends of the Crusaders.

It was under such circumstances that misrepresentation and plain fiction came to permeate the first Western book devoted exclusively to the Persian Nizari Ismailis of the Alamut period written by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856). This Austrian orientalist-diplomat endorsed Marco Polo's narrative in its entirety as well as all the medieval defamations levelled against the Ismailis by their Sunni enemies. Originally published in German in 1818, this book achieved great success in Europe and continued for more than a century to be treated as the standard history of the Nizari Ismailis.[12] With rare exceptions, notably the studies of Étienne M. Quatremère (1782–1857) and Charles F. Defrémery (1822–1883), the Ismailis continued to be misrepresented to various degrees by later orientalists such as Michael

J. de Goeje (1836–1909), who made valuable contributions to the study of the Qarmatis of Bahrayn but whose incorrect interpretation of Fatimid-Qarmati relations was generally adopted.[13] Orientalism, thus, gave a new lease of life to the myths surrounding the Ismailis; and this deplorable state of Ismaili studies remained essentially unchanged until the 1930s. Even an eminent orientalist like Edward G. Browne (1862–1926), who covered the Ismailis rather tangentially in his magisterial survey of Persian literature, could not resist reiterating the orientalistic tales of his predecessors on the Ismailis.[14] As a result, Westerners also continued to refer to the Nizari Ismailis as the Assassins, a misnomer rooted in a medieval pejorative neologism.[15]

The breakthrough in Ismaili studies had to await the recovery and study of genuine Ismaili texts on a large scale, manuscript sources which had been preserved secretly in numerous private collections. A few Ismaili manuscripts of Syrian provenance had already surfaced in Paris during the 19th century, and some fragments of these texts were studied and published there by Stanislas Guyard (1846–1884) and other orientalists. More Ismaili manuscripts preserved in Yaman and Central Asia were recovered in the opening decades of the 20th century. In particular, a collection of Arabic Ismaili manuscripts were recovered from Yaman, and a number of Persian Nizari texts were collected from Shughnan, Rushan and other districts of Badakhshan (now divided by the Oxus River between Tajikistan and Afghanistan) and studied by a few Russian scholars, notably Aleksandr A. Semenov (1873–1958), another Russian pioneer in Ismaili studies.[16] The Ismaili manuscripts of Central Asian provenance found their way to the Asiatic Museum in St. Petersburg, now part of the collections of the Institute of Oriental Studies there. However, by the 1920s, knowledge of European scholars and librarians about Ismaili literature was still very limited.[17]

Modern scholarship in Ismaili studies was actually initiated in the 1930s in India, where significant collections of Ismaili manuscripts have been preserved by the Ismaili Bohra community. This breakthrough resulted mainly from the efforts of Wladimir Ivanow and a few Ismaili Bohra scholars, notably Asaf A.A. Fyzee (1899–1981), Husain F. al-Hamdani (1901–1962) and Zahid ʿAli (1888–1958),[18] who based their original studies on their family collections of manuscripts.

Ivanow, who eventually settled in Bombay after leaving his native Russia in 1917, also succeeded in gaining access to Nizari literature as well. Consequently, he compiled the first detailed catalogue of Ismaili works, citing some 700 separate titles, attesting to the richness and diversity of Ismaili literature and intellectual traditions. The initiation of modern scholarship in Ismaili studies may indeed be traced to the publication of this very catalogue, which provided a scientific frame for further research in the field.[19] Ismaili scholarship received a major impetus through the establishment in Bombay, in 1946, of the Ismaili Society under the patronage of Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III (1877–1957), the 48th imam of the Nizari Ismailis. Ivanow played a crucial role in the creation of the Ismaili Society whose various series of publications were mainly devoted to his own monographs as well as editions and translations of Persian Nizari texts.[20] He also acquired a large number of Persian and Arabic manuscripts for the Ismaili Society's Library.

By 1963, when Ivanow published a revised edition of his catalogue,[21] many more Ismaili sources had become known and numerous texts were being edited, preparing the ground for further progress in this relatively new area of Islamic studies. In this connection, particular mention should be made of the Ismaili texts of Fatimid and later times edited and studied by Henry Corbin (1903–1978), published in Tehran and Paris in his 'Bibliothèque Iranienne' series; and Fatimid texts edited by the Egyptian scholar Muhammad Kamil Husayn (1901–1961) and published in his 'Silsilat makhtutat al-Fatimiyyin' series in Cairo. Meanwhile, a number of Russian scholars, such as Andrey E. Bertel's (1926–1995) and Lyudmila V. Stroeva (1910–1993), had maintained the earlier interests of their compatriots in Ismaili studies. In Syria, ʿArif Tamir (1921–1998) and Mustafa Ghalib (1923–1981) made the Ismaili texts of Syrian provenance available to scholars, while several Egyptian scholars such as Hasan I. Hasan (1892–1981), Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal (1911–1967) and ʿAbd al-Munʿim Majid (1920–1999) made further contributions to Fatimid studies. At the same time other European scholars, such as Paul Casanova (1861–1926), Marius Canard (1888–1982) and Paul Kraus (1904–1944), were making their own contributions to the field. By the mid-1950s, progress in Ismaili studies had enabled Marshall G.S. Hodgson (1922–1968) to produce the

first scholarly and comprehensive study of the Nizaris of the Alamut period.[22] Soon, others representing a new generation of scholars, notably Samuel M. Stern (1920–1969) and Wilferd Madelung, published pathbreaking studies, especially on the early Ismailis and the dissident Qarmatis. Indeed, Professor Madelung masterfully summed up the current state of research on Ismaili history in his article 'Isma'iliyya', written for the new edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

The modern progress in the recovery and study of the Ismaili sources is well reflected in Professor Ismail K. Poonawala's monumental work,[23] which identifies some 1300 titles written by more than 200 Ismaili authors, as well as in the present author's *Ismaili Literature*. Scholarship in Ismaili studies is set to continue at an even greater pace through the efforts of yet another generation of scholars, including Abbas Hamdani, Heinz Halm and Paul E. Walker, and as the Ismailis themselves are becoming increasingly interested in studying their literary heritage and history. In this context, a major contribution is made by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, established in London in 1977 by H.H. Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, the present imam of the Nizari Ismailis. This institution is already serving as the central point of reference for Ismaili studies while making its own contributions through various programmes of research and publications. Amongst these, particular mention should be made of the monographs appearing in the Institute's 'Ismaili Heritage Series' which aims to make available to wide audiences the results of modern scholarship on the Ismailis and their intellectual and cultural traditions; and the 'Ismaili Texts and Translations Series' in which critical editions of Arabic and Persian texts are published together with English translations and contextualizing introductions.[24] Numerous scholars worldwide participate in these academic programmes, as well as in the recently initiated series devoted to the Ismaili-related *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'* (critical edition and English translation), and many more benefit from the accessibility of the Ismaili manuscripts held at the Institute's library, representing the largest collection of its kind in the West.[25] With these modern developments, the scholarly study of the Ismailis, which by the closing decades of the 20th century had already greatly deconstructed and explained the seminal anti-Ismaili legends of medieval times, promises to dissipate the remaining misrepresenta-

tions of the Ismailis rooted either in 'hostility' or the 'imaginative ignorance' of earlier generations.

Notes

1. See Paul E. Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources* (London, 2002), and F. Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London, 2004), especially pp. 20–38.

2. F. Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 120–158.

3 . Abu Mansur ʿAbd al-Qahir b. Tahir al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, ed. M. Badr (Cairo, 1328/1910), pp. 265–299; English trans., *Moslem Schisms and Sects*, part II, tr. A.S. Halkin (Tel Aviv, 1935), pp. 107–157.

4. S.M. Stern, 'The "Book of the Highest Initiation" and other Anti-Ismaʿili Travesties', in his *Studies in Early Ismaʿilism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983), pp. 56–83.

5. See especially W. Ivanow's *The Alleged Founder of Ismailism* (Bombay, 1946).

6. Nizam al-Mulk, *Siyar al-muluk (Siyasat-nama)*, ed. H. Darke (2nd ed., Tehran, 1347 Sh./1968), p. 311; English trans., *The Book of Government; or, Rules for Kings*, tr. H. Darke (2nd ed., London, 1978), p. 231.

7. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Fada'ih al-Batiniyya*, ed. ʿA. Badawi (Cairo, 1964), pp. 21–36.

8. For a survey of these legends, see F. Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Ismaʿilis* (London, 1994), especially pp. 88–127.

9. Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, ed. and tr. H. Yule, 3rd revised ed. by H. Cordier (London, 1929), vol. 1, pp. 139–146.

10. See, for instance, Camille Falconet, 'Dissertation sur les Assassins, peuple d'Asie', in *Mémoires de Littérature, tirés des registres de l'Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, 17 (1751), pp. 127–170; English trans., 'A Dissertation on the Assassins, a People of Asia', in John of Joinville, *Memoirs of Lord John de Joinville*, tr. T. Johnes (Hafod, 1807), vol. 2, pp. 287–328.

11. A.I. Silvestre de Sacy, 'Mémoire sur la dynastie des Assassins, et sur l'étymologie de leur nom', *Mémoires de l'Institut de France*, 4 (1818), pp. 1–84; reprinted in Bryan S. Turner, ed., *Orientalism: Early Sources*, Volume I, *Readings in Orientalism* (London, 2000), pp. 118–169; English trans., 'Memoir on the Dynasty of the Assassins, and on the Etymology of their Name', in Daftary, *Assassin Legends*, pp. 136–188.

12. J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *Die Geschichte der Assassinen aus Morgenländischen Quellen* (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1818); English trans., *The History of the Assassins, derived from Oriental Sources*, tr. O.C. Wood (London, 1835; reprinted, New York, 1968); French trans., *Histoire de l'ordre des Assassins*, tr. J.J. Hellert and P.A. de la Nourais (Paris, 1833; reprinted, Paris, 1961).

13. Michael Jan de Goeje, *Mémoire sur les Carmathes du Bahraïn et les Fatimides* (Leiden, 1862; 2nd ed., Leiden, 1886).

14. E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge, 1902–24), vol. 1, pp. 391–415; vol. 2, pp. 190–211, 453–460.

15. Freya M. Stark (1893–1993), the celebrated traveller to the Alamut valley, entitled her travelogue *The Valleys of the Assassins* (London, 1934) where she also cited von Hammer-Purgstall as a main authority on the Nizari Ismailis.

16. A.A. Semenov, 'Opisanie ismailitskikh rukopisey, sobrannïkh A.A. Semyonovïm', *Bulletin de l'Académie des Sciences de Russie*, 6 série, 12 (1918), pp. 2171–2202.

17. See L. Massignon, 'Esquisse d'une bibliographie Qarmate', in T.W. Arnold and R.A. Nicholson, ed., *A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to Edward G. Browne on his 60th Birthday* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 329–338; reprinted in L. Massignon, *Opera Minora*, ed. Y. Moubarac (Paris, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 627–639

18. The Zahid ʿAli collection of some 226 Arabic Ismaili manuscripts was donated in 1997 to The Institute of Ismaili Studies; see D. Cortese, *Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zahid ʿAli Collection in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 2003). Manuscripts from the Hamdani and Fyzee collections have been donated to the Bombay University Library.

19. W. Ivanow, *A Guide to Ismaili Literature* (London, 1933).

20. See the following articles by F. Daftary: 'Bibliography of the Publications of the late W. Ivanow', *Islamic Culture*, 45 (1971), pp. 56–67; 56 (1982), pp. 239–240; 'W. Ivanow: A Biographical Notice', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 8 (1972), pp. 241–244; 'Anjoman-e Esmaʿili', *EIR*, vol. 2, p. 84, and 'Ivanow, Wladimir', *EIR* (forthcoming).

21. W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963).

22. M.G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* (The Hague, 1955).

23. I.K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismaʿili Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977).

24. These series were launched, respectively, with P.E. Walker's *Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani: Intellectual Missionary* (London, 1996), and Ibn al-Haytham's *Kitab al-Munazarat*, ed. and tr. W. Madelung and P.E. Walker as *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shiʿi Witness* (London, 2000). For a complete listing,

see The Institute of Ismaili Studies, Department of Academic Research and Publications, *Catalogue of Publications, 2004–2005* (London, 2004). See also P.E. Walker, 'The Institute of Ismaili Studies', *EIR*, vol. 13, pp. 164–166.

25. See A. Gacek, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 1984), vol. 1; D. Cortese, *Ismaili and Other Arabic Manuscripts: A Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 2000), and her already-cited *Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zahid ʿAli Collection in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies*.

Part I

The Early and Fatimid Phases

3

The Early Ismaili Movement and the Ismaili-Qarmati Schism

The Ismaili movement was rent by a major schism in the year 286/899, shortly after ʿAbd Allah (ʿUbayd Allah) al-Mahdi, the future Fatimid caliph, had succeeded to the central leadership of the Ismailis.* As a result of this schism, brought to the attention of modern scholars by the recent progress in Ismaili studies, early Ismailism was split into two rival factions, which later became generally designated as Fatimid Ismailism and Qarmatism. This chapter aims to investigate the circumstances and issues surrounding this schism, which centred around the variations in the doctrine of the imamate upheld by different groups of the early Ismailis.

The origins of Ismailism as a separate branch of Imami Shiʿism may be traced to the dispute over the succession to Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (d. 148/765). Often living clandestinely, and conducting their *daʿwa* or missionary activities secretly in order to escape persecution at the hands of their numerous enemies, the Ismailis have nevertheless had a very eventful history, extending over some twelve centuries and through many Muslim lands from North Africa to Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The Ismailis twice succeeded in establishing important states of their own, the Fatimid caliphate (297–567/909–1171) and the Nizari state of Persia and Syria (483–654/1090–1256), in addition to winning many Muslim dynasties and individual rulers to their side. Ismailism has also undergone several major and minor schisms. The schism of the year 286/899 was the first major one in the community, and it had important consequences for the history of Ismailism.

Early Ismailism, extending from the middle of the 2nd/8th century to the foundation of the Ismaili Fatimid state in North Africa in 297/909, is the most obscure major phase in the entire history of Ismailism. Many aspects of the early stages of the Ismaili movement will doubtless continue to be shrouded in uncertainty due to a lack of reliable sources. However, as a result of the modern progress in Ismaili studies, which started in the 1930s, scholars now possess a much better understanding of the fundamental events and trends in the history of the early Ismailis who contributed significantly to the subsequent religio-political success of their movement.[1]

The Ismaili historiography which may be utilized for studying the schism of 286/899, is rather meagre. Being preoccupied with their survival and anti-Abbasid campaign, the pre-Fatimid Ismailis themselves produced only a few anonymous tracts, which are rather poor in historical information. But these works, now recovered and attributed variously to the famous early Ismaili *daʿi* in Yaman, Ibn Hawshab, better known as Mansur al-Yaman (d. 302/914), or to his son Jaʿfar, do contain important details on the doctrines preached by the early Ismaili *daʿwa* or mission.[2] Similarly, the numerous extant Ismaili treatises produced in Fatimid times rarely contain historical references to the pre-Fatimid period of the movement. A few of these Fatimid Ismaili works are, however, relevant to our investigation, especially a letter of the first Fatimid caliph ʿAbd Allah al-Mahdi addressed to the Ismaili community in Yaman. This letter, written sometime between 297/910 and 322/934 and preserved by Jaʿfar b. Mansur al-Yaman in his *Kitab al-faraʾid wa-hudud al-din*, is the most important Ismaili document dealing with the schism of 286/899.[3] It is also worth noting that only one general history of Ismailism seems to have been written by an Ismaili author of medieval times, namely, a seven-volume work by Idris ʿImad al-Din b. al-Hasan (d. 872/1468), the nineteenth Tayyibi *daʿi mutlaq* in Yaman. In the fourth volume of his history, the *daʿi* Idris summarizes the official view of the Fatimid *daʿwa* on early Ismailism without referring to the schism in question.[4]

It is, therefore, not surprising that non-Ismaili sources have remained rather indispensable for studying the history and doctrines of the early Ismailis. Amongst these, heresiographies provide an

important category, especially the works of the Imami scholars al-Nawbakhti (d. after 300/912) and al-Qummi (d. 301/913–14) who wrote shortly before 286/899 and represent the earliest Shiʿi sources dealing with the opening phase of Ismailism. The writings of the polemicists provide another important category of non-Ismaili sources on early Ismailism. Though aiming to discredit the Ismailis through their defamations and travestied accounts, they were generally better informed than al-Tabari (d. 310/923) and other early Sunni historians concerning the doctrines which they purported to refute; perhaps because at least some of the polemicists had access to contemporary Ismaili sources. In particular, the polemical writings of Ibn Rizam and Akhu Muhsin, which have not survived directly, contain valuable details on the schism of 286/899. The anti-Ismaili treatise of Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad b. Rizam, who flourished in Baghdad during the earlier decades of the 4th/10th century, is preserved fragmentarily by Ibn al-Nadim and other later sources. But it was utilized extensively by the Sharif Abu'l-Husayn Muhammad b. ʿAli, better known by his nickname of Akhu Muhsin, an ʿAlid resident of Damascus who produced an anti-Ismaili polemical treatise of his own around 370/980. Substantial portions of Akhu Muhsin's lost treatise, which evidently contained separate historical and doctrinal parts, have been preserved mainly in the writings of three Egyptian historians, namely, al-Nuwayri (d. 732/1332), Ibn al-Dawadari (d. after 736/1335), and al-Maqrizi (d. 845/1442). In modern times, a small group of specialists have produced important studies on the early Ismailis utilizing the above mentioned categories of primary sources. After the pioneering contributions of Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1970), our knowledge of early Ismailism and the schism in question has been particularly enhanced by the original studies of Samuel M. Stern (1920–1969) and Wilferd Madelung.[5]

Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq had originally designated his second son Ismaʿil as his successor to the imamate, by the rule of the *nqass*. But according to the majority of the sources, Ismaʿil either predeceased his father or was otherwise not accessible at the time of his father's death and subsequently, al-Sadiq does not seem to have openly designated another of his sons. As a result, on al-Sadiq's death in Medina in Shawwal 148 AH, three of his sons, ʿAbd Allah, Musa and Muhammad,

simultaneously claimed his succession. The Imami Shiʿi following of Imam al-Sadiq, centred in Kufa, now split into six groups, two of which constituted the earliest Ismailis. The majority of al-Sadiq's followers recognized his eldest surviving son, ʿAbd Allah al-Aftah, the full-brother of Ismaʿil, as their new imam; they became known as Fathiyya or Aftahiyya. When ʿAbd Allah died a few months later, the bulk of his supporters turned to his half-brother Musa, the seventh imam of the Twelver Shiʿa, who had already won the allegiance of a faction of the Imamiyya. However, many of the Fathiyya continued to acknowledge ʿAbd Allah as the rightful imam between al-Sadiq and Musa al-Kazim, and the Fathiyya continued to represent an important Shiʿi group in Kufa until the late 4th/10th century.[6]

Amongst the six groups into which the Imamiyya split, two may be regarded as the earliest Ismaili groups, loyally supporting the claims of Ismaʿil b. Jaʿfar al-Sadiq and his son Muhammad b. Ismaʿil. These groups, designated as al-Ismaʿiliyya al-khalisa and al-Mubarakiyya by the Imami heresiographers, now separated from the rest of the Imamiyya.[7] Denying the death of Ismaʿil during his father's lifetime, al-Ismaʿiliyya al-khalisa, or the 'pure Ismaʿiliyya', maintained that Ismaʿil was al-Sadiq's rightful successor; they in fact held that Ismaʿil remained alive in hiding and would eventually return as the Mahdi or Qa'im. By contrast, the Mubarakiyya, accepting Ismaʿil's death during his father's lifetime, recognized Ismaʿil's eldest son Muhammad as their new imam after al-Sadiq. It has now become evident that the name Mubarak (the 'blessed') was the epithet of Ismaʿil himself and it was applied as such to him by his followers.[8] In other words, it is certain that the Mubarakiyya, like the 'pure Ismaʿiliyya', had actually come into existence during the lifetime of Imam al-Sadiq, and that the Mubarakiyya were at first the followers of Ismaʿil before tracing the imamate to his son Muhammad in the aftermath of al-Sadiq's death.[9]

According to the heresiographical tradition, there seems to have existed also some relationships between these earliest Ismaili groups and the Khattabiyya, who were originally followers of Abu'l-Khattab (d. 138/755–6), the foremost amongst the Shiʿi *ghulat* in the entourage of Imam al-Sadiq. The origins of these relationships, generally exaggerated by the heresiographers, can be traced to the association that

existed between Ismaʿil himself and the early Khattabiyya and other radical Shiʿis for anti-Abbasid revolutionary purposes.[10] Be it as it may, it has now become clear that Ismailism during its opening phase did not represent a unified movement; instead, it was comprised of at least two Kufan splinter groups, which must have been also numerically insignificant. These features were soon accentuated when the Mubarakiyya themselves split into two groups on the death of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil, who had maintained his close contacts with the Kufan-based Mubarakiyya even after leaving Medina and going into hiding in Iraq and then in Persia.

Muhammad b. Ismaʿil seems to have spent the latter part of his life in Khuzistan, in south-western Persia, where he had some following. Though the exact year of his death remains unknown, it is almost certain that Muhammad b. Ismaʿil died soon after 179/795–96, during the caliphate of the Abbasid Harun al-Rashid (170–193/786–809). On his death, the Mubarakiyya split into two groups.[11] The majority, identified by the Imami heresiographers as the immediate predecessors of the Qarmatis, refused to accept the death of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil who, according to them, remained alive and would return in the imminent future as the Mahdi or Qa'im. They regarded Muhammad as their seventh and last imam. A second rather small and obscure group, which also issued from the Mubarakiyya, traced the imamate in the progeny of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil whose death had been acknowledged by them. As we shall see, it was the official adoption of the latter group's doctrine of the imamate, by ʿAbd Allah al-Mahdi in his capacity as the central leader of the Ismaili movement, that led to the schism of the year 286/899.

Nothing is known about the subsequent fate of these earliest Ismaili groups and their leaders, until the historical emergence of a unified Ismaili movement almost a century later, shortly after the middle of the 3rd/9th century.[12] It seems that during this obscure period, a group of leaders worked patiently and secretly for the creation of a more unified and dynamic Ismaili movement. These leaders had been originally attached to one of the earliest Ismaili groups, and were possibly the imams of one of the two sub-groups into which the Mubarakiyya split on the death of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil. At any rate, these leaders, observing *taqiyya* to safeguard themselves, did

not at the time openly claim the imamate, as explained later by ʿAbd Allah al-Mahdi. In the event, it may be assumed that the Mubaraki sub-group that upheld continuity in the imamate after Muhammad b. Ismaʿil, and representing perhaps the smallest of the earliest Ismaili groups, soon lost the bulk of its adherents to the other two groups. This also explains why no particular details are given in any contemporary source on this Mubaraki sub-group; while the Imami heresiographers, who are well-informed on Shiʿi subdivisions, are unable to name the imams of this sub-group after Muhammad b. Ismaʿil.

The existence of such a group of early Ismaili leaders is, indeed, confirmed by both the official view of the later Fatimid Ismailis regarding the early history of their movement, and the hostile Ibn Rizam-Akhu Muhsin account of the same subject. Furthermore, the leaders in question clearly represented a sole group, members of the same family who succeeded one another lineally and on a hereditary basis. This is corroborated by the fact that despite minor variations, the names of these leaders are almost identical in the accounts of the Fatimid Ismailis and the lists traceable to Akhu Muhsin and his source, Ibn Rizam – although the same sources ultimately trace back the ancestry of these leaders to different progenitors, namely, Ismaʿil b. Jaʿfar al-Sadiq or his brother ʿAbd Allah, or ʿAbd Allah b. Maymun al-Qaddah.[13] It is also certain that these leaders were at first based in Ahwaz and ʿAskar Mukram in Khuzistan, and then briefly operated from Basra before settling down permanently in Salamiyya, in central Syria, which served as their residence and headquarters until the year 289/902.

The efforts of the central leaders, who had been reorganizing Ismailism under utmost secrecy, finally bore fruit around the year 260/873–74, when numerous *daʿi*s began to appear in Iraq and other localities, successfully winning an increasing number of converts. At the time, the *daʿwa* activities conducted by the *daʿi*s in different regions were under the direction of the movement's headquarters at Salamiyya, while the identity of the central leaders who resided there continued to be a closely-guarded secret.

In order to maximize the appeal of their movement, the central leaders had found it expedient to propagate the Mahdiship of

Muhammad b. Ismaʿil. This, as we noted, was the doctrine of the Mubaraki majoritarian, constituting the bulk of the earliest Ismaʿilis. This doctrine was also familiar to the 'pure Ismaʿiliyya', who had been awaiting the reappearance of their Imam-Mahdi, Ismaʿil, whose name by then could easily have been replaced by that of his son Muhammad b. Ismaʿil. After all, many of the earliest Ismailis had acknowledged the imamate of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil who had led them after Ismaʿil and Imam al-Sadiq. At any rate, it was in Muhammad b. Ismaʿil's name that the central leaders had now decided to organize the Ismaili *daʿwa*. Some modern authorities, however, deny the existence of any strict historical continuity between the earliest Ismaili splinter groups, based in Kufa, and the widespread Ismaili movement of the 3rd/9th century.[14] Be that as it may, a certain degree of continuity must have existed, as attested by the central role assigned to Muhammad b. Ismaʿil in early Ismaili thought, as well as the fact that the central leaders who were responsible for organizing the movement of the 3rd/9th century, belonged to a single line of hereditary successors, through whom continuity was maintained in the leadership of early Ismailism, from the time of the earliest groups to the movement of a century later.

It was under such circumstances that the *daʿwa* was organized in Iraq in 261 AH. It was in that year that Hamdan Qarmat was converted to Ismaili Shiʿism by the *daʿi* al-Husayn al-Ahwazi, who had been sent from Salamiyya to propagate the Ismaili doctrines in southern Iraq.[15] Hamdan organized the *daʿwa* in his native locality, the Sawad of Kufa, and other parts of southern Iraq, appointing *daʿi*s for the major districts. Hamdan's chief assistant was his brother-in-law ʿAbdan, who probably came from Ahwaz and enjoyed a high degree of independence. Soon, Hamdan and ʿAbdan won many converts who became known as the Qaramita (singular, Qarmati), named after their first local leader.

The Ismaili *daʿwa* was extended to other regions, outside Iraq, during the 260s/870s. In southern Persia, the *daʿwa* was started under the Qarmati leaders of Iraq, who recruited and trained Abu Saʿid al-Jannabi, a native of Fars. After his initial career in southern Persia, Abu Saʿid was despatched by Hamdan to Bahrayn, where he eventually founded a state. In 266/879–80, the central leadership

of the Ismaili movement recruited the famous *daʿi*s Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman and ʿAli b. al-Fadl for propagating the *daʿwa* in Yaman, where they achieved long-lasting success soon after their arrival in 268/881. It was also from Yaman that Ibn Hawshab sent *daʿi*s to Sind and other remote regions. Ibn Hawshab maintained his close relationship with the central leaders at Salamiyya and, in 279/892, he despatched Abu ʿAbd Allah al-Shiʿi to the Maghrib, where Ismailism was preached successfully among the Kutama Berbers and the ground was prepared for the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate. It was around 260 AH that the Ismaili *daʿwa* appeared also in many parts of central and north-western Persia, the region of the Jibal, where the *daʿi*s established their local headquarters at Rayy; and about three decades later, around 290/903, the *daʿwa* was extended to Khurasan and Transoxania.

As noted, the doctrine of the imamate preached by the Ismaili *daʿwa* of the second half of the 3rd/9th century centred around the Mahdiship of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil. More details of the beliefs of the Ismailis of this pre-Fatimid period can be derived from what al-Nawbakhti and al-Qummi relate about the Qarmatis, as these writers do not mention any other specific Ismaili group of their time and their accounts antedate the schism of 286/899.[16] At the time, the Ismailis limited the number of their imams to seven, starting with ʿAli b. Abi Talib and ending with Muhammad b. Ismaʿil, who was designated as the Imam al-Qa'im al-Mahdi and also a *natiq* or 'speaker'. The Ismailis, in fact, recognized a series of seven such speakers, namely, Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, ʿIsa, Muhammad and, lastly, Muhammad b. Ismaʿil whose return was eagerly expected. The pre-Fatimid Ismailis had, thus, combined their doctrine of the imamate with their particular conceptions of time and religious history, which came to be manifested in terms of a cyclical prophetic view of hierohistory. They further believed that in every prophetic era or *dawr*, each *natiq* would be succeeded by a *wasi* (as was ʿAli after Muhammad), who would in turn be followed by seven imams; and the seventh imam of every era would rise in rank to become the *natiq* of the following era, abrogating the law of the previous *natiq* and promulgating a new one. This pattern would change only in the seventh era of history. As the seventh imam of the era of Islam, Muhammad b. Ismaʿil would, on

his reappearance, become the Qa'im and the seventh *natiq*, initiating the final eschatological era. However, unlike the preceding six *natiq*s, he would not announce a new religious law; instead, he would fully reveal the truths (*haqa'iq*) concealed behind all the previous messages, the common truths inherent in the messages of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Between the middle of the 3rd/9th century and the year 286/899, Ismaili Shi'ism represented a unified movement, outwardly preaching the Mahdiship of Muhammad b. Isma'il. Aside from the testimony of the Imami heresiographers, this is attested by the Ibn Rizam-Akhu Muhsin account of the doctrines of the early Ismailis. The Ismaili doctrine of the imamate which Akhu Muhsin describes is in complete agreement with that ascribed to the Qarmatis by al-Nawbakhti and al-Qummi; he lists the same series of seven imams, starting with 'Ali and ending with Muhammad b. Isma'il as the expected Qa'im.[17] The Mahdiship of Muhammad b. Isma'il is also referred to frequently in the extant early Ismaili sources. The *Kitab al-rushd*, for instance, centres around the idea of the reappearance of the Mahdi, the seventh *natiq* whose name is Muhammad.[18] In the *Kitab al-kashf*, too, the expectation of the return of the seventh *natiq* as the Mahdi or Qa'im, often referred to as the *sahib al-zaman*, plays an important part.[19] The matter, as we shall see, received special attention also in 'Abd Allah al-Mahdi's letter to the Yamani Ismailis, in which he tried to explain how the idea of the Mahdiship of Muhammad b. Isma'il had been adopted and misunderstood.

The Ismaili *da'wa* soon met with much success in different regions. In particular, it won many converts amongst the Imamis, who had been dissatisfied with the political quietism of their own branch of Shi'ism and who had, furthermore, been left in disarray and without a manifest imam after the year 260/873–74. In Iraq itself, one of the earliest regions penetrated by the Ismaili movement of the 3rd/9th century, the Ismailis had become numerous by 267/880, capitalizing on the revolt of the Zanj which had prevented the Abbasids from effectively reasserting their control over southern Iraq. It was only from 278/891 onwards that the Abbasid officials at Baghdad became apprehensive of the revolutionary dangers of the Ismailis under the name of al-Qaramita.[20] At the time, the doctrine preached by Hamdan and

ʿAbdan must have been that ascribed to the Qarmatis by al-Nawbakhti and al-Qummi, and confirmed by the Ibn Rizam-Akhu Muhsin account and the early Ismaili sources. There is no indication that, during 260–286/873–899, the beliefs of the Qarmatis of Iraq differed in any significant respect from those held by the Qarmati (Ismaili) communities elsewhere. Indeed, the Imami heresiographers, in their well-informed accounts of the Ismailis before the year 286/899, do not refer to any Ismaili group other than the Qarmatis. During that period, Ismailism represented a unified movement, centrally directed from Salamiyya by a hereditary line of leaders. These features of the early Ismaili movement soon changed drastically.

Hamdan Qarmat had maintained correspondence with the *daʿwa* headquarters at Salamiyya, where the central leaders of the movement had continued to reside. In 286/899, shortly after ʿAbd Allah (ʿUbayd Allah) b. al-Husayn, the future Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mahdi, had succeeded to the central leadership, Hamdan noticed some changes in the written instructions sent to him from Salamiyya. The new instructions alarmed Hamdan because they appeared to reflect significant changes regarding the doctrine of the imamate upheld hitherto by the Ismailis. In order to obtain accurate information on this doctrinal change, Hamdan despatched his closest colleague ʿAbdan to Salamiyya. Apparently, this was the first personal contact between the important local leaders in Iraq and the central leadership, whose identity had remained a closely-guarded secret. Indeed, it was only upon arriving at Salamiyya that ʿAbdan was informed of the recent accession of ʿAbd Allah to the leadership, following the death of the previous head of the movement. In his meeting with ʿAbd Allah during which a number of essential doctrinal issues were discussed, ʿAbdan learned that instead of recognizing the Mahdiship of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil, on whose behalf the *daʿwa* had been conducted, the new leader now claimed the imamate for himself and his ancestors, who had organized and led the Ismaili *daʿwa*. Details on ʿAbdan's mission and the information gathered by him at Salamiyya, are fully related by Akhu Muhsin, who seems to have had access to some Qarmati sources in addition to Ibn Rizam's treatise, his usual source.[21]

On receiving ʿAbdan's report, which confirmed ʿAbd Allah's doctrinal change, Hamdan renounced his allegiance to the central

leadership and the *daʿwa* headquarters at Salamiyya. He gathered his subordinate *daʿi*s and informed them of what had transpired, also instructing them to suspend the *daʿwa* activities in their respective districts. Soon afterwards, Hamdan disappeared; while ʿAbdan, who had fully endorsed Hamdan's rupture with Salamiyya, was murdered at the instigation of Zikrawayh b. Mihrawayh, a *daʿi* in western Iraq who remained temporarily loyal to the central leadership. Akhu Muhsin states that all these events occurred in the year 286 AH.

The change introduced by ʿAbd Allah, which led to a major schism in the early Ismaili movement, essentially concerned the doctrine of the imamate. As noted, according to the Ibn Rizam-Akhu Muhsin account, corroborated by the Imami heresiographers and confirmed by the few extant pre-Fatimid Ismaili sources, the bulk of the Ismailis of the second half of the 3rd/9th century recognized only seven imams, the last one being Muhammad b. Ismaʿil, the expected Qa'im and the seventh *natiq*, on whose behalf the *daʿwa* had been propagated in Iraq and elsewhere. Needless to say that the belief in the Mahdiship of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil had left no place for further imams after him. However, soon after his own accession to the leadership, ʿAbd Allah had felt secure enough to make an open claim to the imamate for himself and his predecessors, the same central leaders who had actually organized and directed the movement after Muhammad b. Ismaʿil. Thus, ʿAbd Allah had now formally reasserted the principle of continuity in the imamate, which subsequently became the official doctrine of the Fatimid Ismailis who recognized a series of 'hidden imams' between Muhammad b. Ismaʿil and ʿAbd Allah.[22] Effectively, ʿAbd Allah's declaration amounted to the denial of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil's Mahdiship, the central aspect of the doctrine of the imamate hitherto upheld by the early Ismailis. This important declaration had other aspects which are dealt with in ʿAbd Allah's letter to the Yamani Ismailis in which an attempt is made to reconcile it with the actual course of events in the history of the early Ismailis after Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq.[23]

Before ʿAbd Allah's doctrinal declaration, the central leaders of the Ismaili movement had actually assumed the rank of the *hujja*, or the full representative of the absent imam, for themselves; and they had been regarded as such by the Ismaili community, including the

Qarmatis. This is reported by Akhu Muhsin,[24] and confirmed by certain allusions found in the early Ismaili sources.[25] It was, indeed, only through the *hujja* that the faithful could establish contact with the imam; and the imam referred to the hidden Qa'im. In other words, the central leaders of the movement had at first acted as the *hujja*s of the hidden Muhammad b. Isma'il and preached the *da'wa* in his name. This is also explained in 'Abd Allah's letter, which states that as a form of *taqiyya* and in order to hide their identities, the central leaders assumed various pseudonyms and also disguised themselves as *hujja*s. Thus, by his declaration, 'Abd Allah had openly elevated himself and his predecessors, who had secretly all along regarded themselves as imams and were acknowledged as such by a small trusted group of associates, from the *hujja*s of the awaited Muhammad b. Isma'il to the actual imams. Therefore, the reform took cognizance of the historical continuity in the central leadership of the movement, while changing the status of the same leaders from *hujja*s to imams.

In his letter, 'Abd Allah further explains that the imams, who disguised themselves as the *hujja*s of the hidden Mahdi, had also adopted cover names or pseudonyms such as Mubarak, Maymun and Sa'id as additional measures of *taqiyya*. In this connection, it may be added that according to Ibn Rizam and Akhu Muhsin, the same leadership had also claimed descent from 'Aqil b. Abi Talib, the brother of 'Ali.[26] This claim has been investigated by H. Halm.[27] It is also known that at Salamiyya the central leaders posed as ordinary Hashimids and merchants.[28] All this evidence reveals how successful the Ismaili leaders must have been in concealing their true identity under different guises in order to escape persecution at the hands of the Abbasid officials. 'Abd Allah in effect states that the leaders before him had been so successful in their *taqiyya* practices and other diversionary tactics that most Ismailis themselves had wrongly come to believe in the Mahdiship of Muhammad b. Isma'il, whereas the imamate had in fact continued after him.

According to 'Abd Allah's letter, the name Muhammad b. Isma'il referred to all the true imams in the progeny of Ja'far al-Sadiq; and consequently, the Mahdiship of Muhammad b. Isma'il had acquired a collective meaning and referred to every imam after Ja'far al-

Sadiq, instead of referring to the latter's particular grandson, until the advent of the Mahdi. Thus, ʿAbd Allah denied the Mahdiship of the particular grandson of Imam al-Sadiq who had hitherto been acknowledged as the expected Qa'im by the bulk of the early Ismailis because, according to him, all the legitimate imams after Jaʿfar al-Sadiq had adopted the name Muhammad b. Ismaʿil as a code-name in addition to other pseudonyms, while also posing as the *hujja*s of the hidden imam. In other words, the central leaders of the early Ismaili movement, who were actually the true imams in the progeny of Jaʿfar al-Sadiq, had disguised themselves under the double guise of '*hujja*s' of 'Muhammad b. Ismaʿil', which was another collective code-name for the same imams. In support of his declaration, ʿAbd Allah attributed a tradition to Imam al-Sadiq, asserting that the family of the Prophet was to produce more than one Mahdi. These are essentially the same points gathered by ʿAbdan at Salamiyya, as related by Akhu Muhsin.[29] ʿAbd Allah's letter also contained some controversial statements regarding his own Fatimid ʿAlid genealogy, which were not confirmed by his successors in the Fatimid dynasty.

The doctrinal pronouncement of ʿAbd Allah and the apostasy of Hamdan and ʿAbdan split the early Ismaili *daʿwa* into two branches in the year 286/899. One branch accepted the change, later incorporated into the official Fatimid Ismaili doctrine of the imamate. These Ismailis, who remained loyal to the central leadership, maintained continuity in the imamate and accepted ʿAbd Allah's explanation that the imamate had been handed down amongst his ancestors, the Fatimid descendants of Jaʿfar al-Sadiq. As a corollary, they repudiated their earlier expectation of the advent of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil as the Mahdi-Qa'im. This Fatimid Ismaili branch included mainly the Yamani community and those founded in the Maghrib, Egypt and Sind by the *daʿi*s sent from Yaman by Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman. The loyalist branch eventually succeeded in founding the Fatimid caliphate in North Africa.

By contrast, the dissident Ismailis, who broke with ʿAbd Allah and refused to acknowledge his claim to the imamate, retained their original belief in the Mahdiship of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil as the expected Qa'im and the seventh *natiq*. Henceforth, the term Qaramita came to be applied more specifically to the dissident Ismailis who did not

acknowledge ʿAbd Allah and his predecessors, as well as his successors in the Fatimid dynasty, as imams. The dissident Qarmati branch comprised the communities in Iraq, Bahrayn and most of those in Persia, situated in the eastern Islamic lands. Ibn Hawqal has preserved a valuable piece of information revealing that Abu Saʿid al-Jannabi, who established his rule over Bahrayn in the same eventful year 286 AH, sided with Hamdan and ʿAbdan against the central leadership.[30] The Qarmati state of Bahrayn, which survived until 470/1077, in time became the main centre of dissident Qarmatism and a menace to the Sunni Abbasids as well as the Shiʿi Ismaili Fatimids. By the end of the 5th/11th century, the Qarmati communities outside of eastern Arabia had either disintegrated or rallied to the side of the Fatimid Ismaili *daʿwa*. Thus, the schism of 286/899, which divided the community into two rival factions, seriously impeded the overall success of the early Ismaili *daʿwa*, as well as playing a decisive role in weakening the Fatimid dynasty's campaign of uprooting the Abbasids and extending their own rule throughout the eastern Islamic lands.

As noted, certain aspects of ʿAbd Allah's doctrinal declaration were not fully incorporated into the teachings of the Fatimid Ismaili *daʿwa*. But it was from the time of ʿAbd Allah's open declaration that the Fatimid Ismailis accepted continuity in the imamate. This, in contrast to the original belief of a majority of the early Ismailis, allowed for more than one heptad of imams in the era of Islam, which was subsequently propounded explicitly in the writings of al-Qadi al-Nuʿman b. Muhammad and other Fatimid authors.[31] In this connection, it is interesting to note that the Ismaili imamate has continued to the present time, and the current imam of the Nizari Ismailis, Prince Aga Khan IV, as the 49th in the series is in fact the seventh imam of the seventh heptad of such imams.

At least from the time of the fourth Fatimid caliph-imam, al-Muʿizz li-Din Allah (341–365/953–975), the Fatimid Ismaili *daʿwa* reiterated aspects of the doctrine of the imamate of the early Ismailis. Al-Muʿizz did, indeed, acknowledge the imamate of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil to whom he traced his genealogy. In addition, as the seventh imam of the era of Islam, Muhammad b. Ismaʿil was once again acknowledged as the Qa'im and the *natiq* of the final era, but with a different interpretation. Muhammad b. Ismaʿil himself

would not return corporeally, but his functions as the Qa'im were to be discharged gradually by the Fatimid caliph-imams who were his descendants.[32] All of the articulations of the views of the unified early Ismailis, however, failed to win the Qarmatis, especially those of Bahrayn, to the side of the Fatimid *da'wa*. The Qarmatis of Bahrayn continued to remain hostile towards the Fatimids, often conducting open warfare against them. Indeed, despite their common early religious heritage, the Qarmatis of Bahrayn, an important military power in eastern Arabia, never joined forces with the Fatimids against their common enemy, the Abbasids; and the divided Ismaili movement never really recovered from the schism of the year 286/899.

Notes

* A longer version of this chapter was originally published as 'A Major Schism in the Early Isma'ili Movement', *Studia Islamica*, 77 (1993), pp. 123–139.

1. See F. Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 17–29, 91ff.

2. See Ismail K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Isma'ili Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977), pp. 34, 73, 74; see also H. Halm, 'Die *Sirat Ibn Haušab*: Die ismailitische *da'wa* im Jemen und die Fatimiden', *Die Welt des Orients*, 12 (1981), pp. 107–135.

3. The text of this letter, edited with a partial English translation by Husayn F. al-Hamdani appears in his *On the Genealogy of Fatimid Caliphs* (Cairo, 1958). An exact translation of this letter, based on further manuscripts, together with a detailed analysis and an interesting hypothesis, may be found in A. Hamdani and F. de Blois, 'A Re-examination of al-Mahdi's Letter to the Yemenites on the Genealogy of the Fatimid Caliphs', *JRAS* (1983), pp. 173–207.

4. Idris 'Imad al-Din, *'Uyun al-akhbar wa-funun al-athar*, vol. 4, ed. M. Ghalib (Beirut, 1973).

5. S.M. Stern's 'Isma'ilis and Qarmatians', in *L'Élaboration de l'Islam* (Paris, 1961), pp. 99–108, and other relevant articles are collected in his *Studies in Early Isma'ilism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983). Madelung's contributions are contained in his 'Fatimiden und Bahrainqarmaten', *Der Islam*, 34 (1959), pp. 34–88; English trans., 'The Fatimids and the Qarmatis of Bahrayn', in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 21–73, and 'Das Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre', *Der Islam*, 37 (1961), pp. 43–135.

6. Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq al-Shiʿa*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), pp. 57, 64–67; Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allah al-Qummi, *al-Maqalat wa'l-firaq*, ed. M.J. Mashkur, (Tehran, 1963), pp. 79–80, 86–89, and W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, NY, 1988), pp. 79–80.

7. Al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq*, pp. 57–58, and al-Qummi, *al-Maqalat*, pp. 80–81. See also Abu Hatim al-Razi, *Kitab al-zina*, vol. 3, ed. ʿAbd Allah al-Samarra'i, in his *al-Ghuluww wa'l-firaq al-ghaliya* (Baghdad, 1988), pp. 287–289.

8. See, for example, Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani, *Ithbat al-nubu'at*, ed. ʿA. Tamir (Beirut, 1966), p. 190, and al-Hamdani, *On the Genealogy*, text p. 10.

9. Al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq*, p. 62, and al-Qummi, *al-Maqalat*, p. 84.

10. For some details, see Muhammad b. ʿUmar al-Kashshi, *Ikhtiyar maʿrifat al-rijal*, abridged by Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Tusi, ed. H. al-Mustafawi (Mashhad, 1348 Sh./1969), pp. 217–218, 244–245, 321, 325–326, 354–356, 390. See also Jaʿfar b. Mansur al-Yaman, *Sara'ir wa-asrar al-nutaqa'*, ed. M. Ghalib (Beirut, 1984), pp. 262–263.

11. Al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq*, p. 61; al-Qummi, *al-Maqalat*, p. 83; see also ʿAli b. Ismaʿil al-Ashʿari, *Kitab maqalat al-Islamiyyin*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1929–30), pp. 26–27, and Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-milal wa'l-nihal*, ed. ʿA.M. al-Wakil (Cairo, 1968), vol. 1, p. 192.

12. For more details on the earliest Ismaili groups, and proto-Ismailis in general, see Madelung, 'Das Imamat', pp. 43–54, and F. Daftary, 'The Earliest lsmaʿilis', *Arabica*, 38 (1991), pp. 214–245; reprinted in E. Kohlberg, ed., *Shiʿism* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 235–266.

13. For the earliest Fatimid lists, see Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Nisaburi, *Istitar al-imam*, ed. W. Ivanow, in *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, University of Egypt*, 4, part 2 (1936), p. 95, and al-Mahdi's letter in al-Hamdani, *On the Genealogy*, text pp. 10–12. The relevant portions of the Ibn Rizam-Akhu Muhsin account may be found in lbn al-Nadim, *Kitab al-fihrist*, ed. M.R. Tajaddud (2nd ed., Tehran, 1973), p. 238; Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar*, vol. 6, ed. S. al-Munajjid (Cairo, 1961), pp. 17–20, and Ahmad b. ʿAli al-Maqrizi, *Ittiʿaz al-hunafa'*, vol. 1, ed. J. al-Shayyal (Cairo, 1967), pp. 23–26.

14. Stern, 'Ismaʿilis and Qarmatians', pp. 100–101; reprinted in his *Studies in Early Ismaʿilism*, pp. 290–291; Madelung, *Religious Trends*, p. 93, and Hamdani and de Blois, 'A Re-examination', p.200.

15. Ahmad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhab al-Nuwayri, *Nihayal al-arab*, vol. 25, ed. M. Jabir ʿA. al-Hini (Cairo, 1984) pp. 189 ff.; Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz*, vol. 6, pp. 44 ff., and al-Maqrizi, *Ittiʿaz*, vol. 1, pp. 151 ff. See also Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-muluk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje el al. (Leiden, 1879–1901), III, pp. 2124 ff.; English trans., *The History of al-Tabari*: Volume 37, *The ʿAbbasid*

Recovery, tr. Philip M. Fields (Albany, NY, 1987), pp. 169 ff.

16. Al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq*, pp. 61–64; al-Qummi, *al-Maqalat*, pp. 83–86; English translation in Stern, *Studies*, pp. 47–53.

17. See, for instance, al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, vol. 25, pp. 203–204, 206.

18. Ibn al-Hawshab, *Kitab al-rushd wa'l-hidaya*, ed. M. Kamil Husayn, in *Collectanea*: Vol. 1, ed. W. Ivanow (Leiden, 1948), pp. 198 ff.

19. Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman, *Kitab al-kashf*, ed. R. Strothmann (London, etc., 1952), pp. 62, 77, 103–104, 109–110, 114, 133, 135, 160, 170.

20. Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, III, pp. 2126–2127; tr. Fields, pp. 171–173.

21. See al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, vol. 25, pp. 216, 227–232; Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz*, vol. 6, pp. 65–68, and al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, vol. 1, pp. 167–168. See also Madelung, 'Das Imamat', pp. 59 ff.

22. This view is summarized in Idris, *'Uyun al-akhbar*, vol. 4, pp. 357–367, 390–404.

23. Text of the letter in al-Hamdani, *On the Genealogy*, text pp. 9–14; English trans. in Hamdani and de Blois, 'A Re-examination', pp. 175–178.

24. See al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, vol. 25, p. 230, and Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz*, vol. 6, p. 65.

25. Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman, *Kitab al-kashf*, pp. 97–99, 102 ff. See also Madelung, 'Das Imamat', pp. 54–58, 61ff., and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 126 ff.

26. Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, p. 238; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, vol. 25, p. 230, and al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, vol. 1, p. 41.

27. In a recent article, H. Halm has hypothesized that 'Abd Allah and his ancestors may actually have had an 'Aqilid Talibid ancestry; see his 'Les Fatimides à Salamya', in *Mélanges offerts au Professeur Dominique Sourdel*; being, *Revue des Études Islamiques,* 54 (1986), pp. 133–149.

28. Al-Nisaburi, *Istitar al-imam*, p. 95.

29. For further implications of 'Abd Allah's doctrinal reform, see Madelung, 'Das Imamat', pp. 65–86.

30. Ibn Hawqal, *Kitab surat al-ard*, ed. J.H. Kramers (2nd ed., Leiden, 1938–39), p. 295.

31. See, for example, Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man b. Muhammad, *Asas al-ta'wil*, ed. 'Arif Tamir (Beirut, 1960), pp. 316–317, 337–338.

32. See Madelung, 'Das Imamat', pp. 86–101, and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 177 ff.

4

The Ismaili *Daʿwa* and the Fatimid *Dawla*

By the middle of the 3rd/9th century, the Ismailis had organized a secret, religio-political movement designated as *al-daʿwa* (the mission) or, more precisely, *al-daʿwa al-hadiya* (the rightly guiding mission).* The overall aim of this dynamic and centrally-directed movement of religious and social reform was to uproot the Abbasids and install the ʿAlid imam acknowledged by the Ismailis to the actual rule of the Islamic community (*umma*). The revolutionary message of the Ismaili *daʿwa* was systematically propagated by a network of *daʿi*s or religio-political missionaries in different parts of the Muslim world, from Transoxania to Yaman and North Africa.

The early Ismaili *daʿi*s summoned the Muslims everywhere to accord their allegiance to the Ismaili Imam-Mahdi, who was expected to deliver the believers from the oppressive rule of the Abbasids and establish justice and a more equitable social order in the world. Thus, the Ismaili *daʿwa* also promised to restore the leadership of the Muslims to ʿAlids, members of the *ahl al-bayt* or the Prophet Muhammad's family, whose legitimate rights to leadership had been successively usurped by the Umayyads and the Abbasids.[1] The Ismaili *daʿi*s won an increasing number of converts among a multitude of discontented groups of diverse social backgrounds. Among such groups mention may be made of the landless peasantry and Bedouin tribesmen whose interests were set apart from those of the prospering urban classes. The *daʿi*s also capitalized on regional grievances. On the basis of a well-designed *daʿwa* strategy, the *daʿi*s were initially more successful in non-urban milieus, removed from the administrative centres of the Abbasid caliphate. This explains the early spread

of Ismailism among rural inhabitants and Bedouin tribesmen of the Arab lands, notably in southern Iraq, eastern Arabia (Bahrayn) and Yaman. In contrast, in the Iranian lands, especially in the Jibal, Khurasan and Transoxania, the *da'wa* was primarily addressed to the ruling classes and the educated elite.

The early Ismaili *da'wa* achieved particular success among those Imami Shi'is of Iraq, Persia and elsewhere, later designated as Ithna'ashariyya (Twelvers), who had been left in a state of disarray and confusion following the death of their eleventh imam and the simultaneous disappearance of his infant son Muhammad in 260/874. These Imamis shared the same early theological heritage with the Ismailis, especially the Imami doctrine of the imamate. This doctrine, which provided the central teaching of the Twelver and Ismaili Shi'is, was based on the belief in the permanent need of mankind for a divinely guided, sinless and infallible (*ma'sum*) imam who, after the Prophet Muhammad, would act as the authoritative teacher and guide of men in all their spiritual affairs. This imam was entitled to temporal leadership as much as to religious authority; his mandate, however, did not depend on his actual rule. The doctrine further taught that the Prophet himself had designated his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 40/661), who was married to the Prophet's daughter Fatima, as his successor under divine command; and that the imamate was to be transmitted from father to son among the descendants of 'Ali and Fatima, through their son al-Husayn (d. 61/680) until the end of time. This 'Alid imam was in possession of a special knowledge or *'ilm* and had perfect understanding of the exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*) meanings of the Qur'an and the commandments and prohibitions of the *shari'a* or the sacred law of Islam. Recognition of this imam, the sole legitimate imam at any time, and obedience to him were made the absolute duties of every believer.[2]

By 286/899, when the Ismailis themselves split into the Fatimid Ismaili and the dissident Qarmati factions, significant Ismaili communities had appeared in numerous regions of the Arab world and throughout the Iranian lands, as well as in North Africa where the Kutama and other Berber tribal confederations had responded to the summons of the Ismaili *da'wa*. The dissident Qarmatis did not acknowledge the imamate of 'Abd Allah al-Mahdi (the future founder

of the Fatimid caliphate) and his predecessors, the central leaders of early Ismailism, as well as his successors in the Fatimid dynasty. In the same eventful year 286/899, the Qarmatis founded a powerful state of their own in Bahrayn, which survived in rivalry with the Fatimid state until 470/1077.[3]

The success of the early Ismaili *daʿwa* was crowned in 297/909 by the establishment of the Fatimid state or *dawla* in North Africa, in Ifriqiya (today's Tunisia and eastern Algeria). The foundation of this Fatimid Ismaili Shiʿi caliphate represented not only a great success for the Ismaʿiliyya, who now possessed for the first time a state under the leadership of their imam, but for the entire Shiʿa. Not since the time of ʿAli had the Shiʿa witnessed the succession of an ʿAlid to the actual leadership of an important Islamic state. By acquiring political power and then transforming the nascent Fatimid *dawla* into a flourishing empire, the Ismaili imam presented his Shiʿi challenge to Abbasid hegemony and Sunni interpretations of Islam. Ismailism, too, had now found its own place among the state-sponsored communities of interpretation in Islam. Henceforth, the Fatimid caliph-imam could claim to act as the spiritual spokesman of Shiʿi Islam in general, much like the Abbasid caliph did for Sunni Islam.

On 20 Rabiʿ II 297/4 January 910, the Ismaili Imam ʿAbd Allah al-Mahdi made his triumphant entry into Raqqada, the Aghlabid capital in Ifriqiya, where he was acclaimed as caliph by the Kutama Berbers and the notables of the uprooted Aghlabid state. On the following day, the *khutba* was pronounced for the first time in all the mosques of Qayrawan in the name of ʿAbd Allah al-Mahdi. At the same time, a manifesto was read from the pulpits announcing that leadership had finally come to be vested in the *ahl al-bayt*. As one of the first acts of the new regime, the jurists of Ifriqiya were instructed to give their legal opinions in accordance with the Shiʿi principles of jurisprudence. The new caliphate and dynasty came to be known as Fatimid (Fatimiyya), derived from the name of the Prophet's daughter Fatima, to whom al-Mahdi and his successors traced their ancestry.

The ground for the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate in Ifriqiya had been carefully prepared since 280/893 by the *daʿi* Abu ʿAbd Allah al-Shiʿi, who had been active among the Kutama Berbers of the Lesser Kabylia. It was from his base in the Maghrib that the

daʿi al-Shiʿi converted the bulk of the Kutama Berbers and with their support he eventually seized all of Ifriqiya. It is to be noted, however, that Shiʿism had never taken deep roots in North Africa, where the native Berbers generally adhered to diverse schools of Kharijism while Qayrawan, founded as a garrison town and inhabited by Arab warriors, remained the stronghold of Maliki Sunnism. Under such circumstances, the newly converted Berbers' understanding of Ismaili Shiʿism, which at the time still lacked a distinctive school of law (*madhhab*), was rather superficial — a phenomenon that remained essentially unchanged in subsequent decades. The *daʿi* al-Shiʿi personally taught the Kutama initiates Ismaili tenets in regular lectures. These lectures were known as the 'sessions of wisdom' (*majalis al-hikma*), as esoteric Ismaili doctrine was referred to as 'wisdom' or *hikma*. Abu ʿAbd Allah al-Shiʿi instructed his subordinate *daʿi*s to hold similar sessions in the areas under their jurisdiction.[4] Later, the *daʿi* al-Shiʿi's brother Abu'l-ʿAbbas, another learned *daʿi* of high intellectual calibre, held public disputations with the leading Maliki jurists of Qayrawan, expounding the Shiʿi foundations of the new regime and the legitimate rights of the *ahl al-bayt* to the leadership of the Islamic community. The ground was thus rapidly laid also doctrinally for the establishment of the new Shiʿi caliphate.

The Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mahdi (d. 322/934) and his next three successors, ruling from Ifriqiya, encountered numerous difficulties while consolidating the pillars of their state. In addition to the continued animosity of the Abbasids and the Umayyads of Spain, who as rival claimants to the caliphate entertained their own designs for North Africa, the early Fatimids had numerous military entanglements with the Byzantines. They also devoted much of their energy to subduing the rebellions of the Khariji Berbers, especially those belonging to the Zanata confederation, and the hostilities of the Sunni inhabitants of the cities of Ifriqiya led by their influential Maliki jurists. All this made it extremely difficult for the early Fatimids to secure control over any region of the Maghrib, beyond the heartland of Ifriqiya, for any extended period. It also made the further propagation of the Ismaili *daʿwa* rather impractical in the Maghrib. In fact, ʿAbd Allah al-Mahdi and his immediate successors did not actively engage in the extension of their *daʿwa* in order to avoid

hostile reactions of the majoritarian Khariji and Sunni inhabitants of North Africa. Nevertheless, the Ismailis were now for the first time permitted to practise their faith openly and without fearing persecution within Fatimid dominions, while outside the boundaries of their state they were obliged, as before, to observe *taqiyya* or precautionary dissimulation of their true beliefs.

In line with their universal claims, the Fatimid caliph-imams had, however, not abandoned their *daʿwa* aspirations on assuming power. Claiming to possess sole legitimate religious authority, the Fatimids aimed to extend their authority and rule over the entire Muslim *umma* and even over non-Muslims. As a result, they retained the network of *daʿi*s operating on their behalf both within and outside Fatimid dominions, although initially they effectively refrained from *daʿwa* activities within the Fatimid state. It took the Fatimids several decades to formally establish their rule in North Africa. Only the fourth Fatimid caliph-imam, al-Muʿizz (341–365/953–975), was able to pursue successfully policies of war and diplomacy, also concerning himself specifically with the affairs of the Ismaili *daʿwa*. His overall aim was to extend the universal authority of the Fatimids at the expense of their major rivals, namely, the Umayyads of Spain, the Byzantines and above all, the Abbasids. The process of codifying Ismaili law, too, attained its climax under al-Muʿizz mainly through the efforts of al-Qadi al-Nuʿman (d. 363/974), the foremost Fatimid jurist. Al-Muʿizz officially commissioned al-Nuʿman who headed the Fatimid judiciary from 337/948 in the reign of the third Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mansur, to promulgate an Ismaili *madhhab*. His efforts culminated in the compilation of the *Daʿaʾim al-Islam (The Pillars of Islam)*, which was endorsed by al-Muʿizz as the official code of the Fatimid *dawla*. In sum, it was al-Qadi al-Nuʿman who elaborated in his legal compendia a doctrinal basis for the Fatimids' legitimacy as ruling caliph-imams, and lending support to their universal claims.[5] The Ismailis, too, now possessed a system of law and jurisprudence as well as an Ismaili paradigm of governance.

Al-Muʿizz, as noted, was the first member of his dynasty to have concerned himself with the Ismaili *daʿwa* outside Fatimid dominions. In addition to preparing the ideological ground for Fatimid rule, his *daʿwa* strategy was based on a number of more specific religio-

political considerations. The propaganda of the Qarmatis of Bahrayn, Iraq, Persia and elsewhere, who had continuously refused to recognize the imamate of the Fatimids, generally undermined the Ismaili *daʿwa* and the activities of the Fatimid *daʿis* in the same regions. It was, indeed, mainly due to the doctrines and practices of the Qarmatis that the entire Ismaili community was accused by the Sunni polemicists and heresiographers of *ilhad* or deviation in religion, as these hostile sources did not distinguish between the dissident Qarmatis and those Ismailis who acknowledged the Fatimid caliphs as their imams. The anti-Ismaili literary campaign of the Sunni establishment, dating mainly to the foundation of Fatimid rule, was particularly intensified in the aftermath of the Qarmatis' sack of Mecca in 317/930. At any rate, al-Muʿizz must have also recognized the military advantages of winning the support of the formidable Qarmati armies, which would have significantly enhanced the chances of the Fatimids' victory over the Abbasids in the central Islamic lands. It was in line with these objectives that al-Muʿizz made certain doctrinal declarations, rooted in the teachings of the early Ismailis and evidently partially designed to prove appealing to the Qarmatis.[6] Perhaps as a concession to the Qarmati camp, al-Muʿizz and the Fatimid *daʿwa* also endorsed the Neoplatonized cosmology first propounded by the Qarmati *daʿi* Muhammad al-Nasafi (d. 332/943) in his *Kitab al-mahsul (Book of the Yield*) written around 300/912. Henceforth, this new cosmology was generally advocated by the Fatimid *daʿwa* in preference to the mythological Kuni-Qadar cosmology of the early Ismailis.[7]

The *daʿwa* strategy of al-Muʿizz won some success in the dissident camp outside the confines of the Fatimid state. The *daʿi* Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani, who had hitherto belonged to the Qarmati faction, switched his allegiance to the Fatimid *daʿwa*. As a result, large numbers of the Qarmatis of Khurasan, Sistan (Arabicized, Sijistan), Makran and Central Asia, where al-Sijistani acted as chief *daʿi* in succession to al-Nasafi and his sons, also acknowledged the Fatimid Ismaili imam. Al-Sijistani was executed as a heretic (*mulhid*) not long after 361/971 on the order of Khalaf b. Ahmad, the Saffarid amir of Sistan, but Ismailism survived in the eastern regions of the Iranian world. Fatimid Ismailism also succeeded in acquiring a permanent stronghold in Sind, in north-western India, where Ismaili communities have

survived to modern times. Around 347/958, through the efforts of a Fatimid *daʿi* who converted a local Hindu ruler, an Ismaili principality was established in Sind, with its seat in Multan (in present-day Pakistan). Large numbers of Hindus converted to Ismailism in that region of the Indian subcontinent, where the *khutba* was read in the name of al-Muʿizz and the Fatimids. This Ismaili principality survived until 396/1005 when Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna invaded Multan and massacred the Ismailis. Despite the hostilities of the Ghaznawids and their successors, Ismailism survived in Sind and later received the protection of the Sumras, who ruled independently from Thatta for almost three centuries starting in 443/1051.[8] On the other hand, Qarmatism persisted in Daylam, Adharbayjan and other parts of Persia, as well as in Iraq and Central Asia for almost a century after al-Muʿizz. Above all, al-Muʿizz failed to win the support of the Qarmatis of Bahrayn, who effectively frustrated the Fatimids' strategy of eastern expansion into Syria and other central Islamic lands.

Meanwhile, al-Muʿizz had made detailed plans for the conquest of Egypt, a vital Fatimid goal which the first two members of the dynasty had failed to achieve. To that end, the Fatimid *daʿwa* was intensified in Egypt, then beset by numerous economic and political difficulties under disintegrating Ikhshidid rule. Jawhar, the capable Fatimid commander who had pacified North Africa for al-Muʿizz, was selected to lead the Egyptian expedition. Having encountered only token resistance, Jawhar entered Fustat, the capital of Ikhshidid Egypt, in Shaʿban 358/July 969. Jawhar behaved leniently towards Egyptians, declaring a general amnesty. Subsequently, the Fatimids introduced the Ismaili *madhhab* only gradually in Egypt, where Shiʿism had never acquired a stronghold. Fatimid Egypt remained primarily Sunni, of the Shafiʿi *madhhab*, with an important community of Christian Copts. The Fatimids never attempted forced conversion of their subjects and the minoritarian status of the Shiʿa remained unchanged in Egypt despite two centuries of Ismaili Shiʿi rule.

Jawhar camped his army to the north of Fustat and immediately proceeded to build a new royal city there, the future Fatimid capital al-Qahira (Cairo). Al-Muʿizz had personally supervised the plan of Cairo with its al-Azhar mosque and Fatimid palace complex. Jawhar ruled over Egypt for four years until the arrival of al-Muʿizz.

In line with the eastern strategy of the Fatimids, in 359/969 Jawhar despatched the main body of the Fatimid armies for the conquest of Palestine and Syria. In the following year, the Fatimids were defeated near Damascus by a coalition of the Qarmatis of Bahrayn, Buyids and other powers. Later in 361/971, the Qarmatis of Bahrayn advanced to the gates of Fustat before being driven back. Henceforth, there occurred numerous military encounters between the Fatimids and the Qarmatis of Bahrayn, postponing the establishment of Fatimid rule over Syria for several decades.[9]

In the meantime, al-Muʿizz had made meticulous preparations for the transference of the seat of the Fatimid state to Egypt. He appointed Buluggin b. Ziri, the amir of the loyal Sanhaja Berbers, as governor of Ifriqiya. Buluggin, like his father, had faithfully defended the Fatimids against the Zanata Berbers and other enemies in North Africa; and later he was to found the Zirid dynasty of the Maghrib (361–543/972–1148). Accompanied by the entire Fatimid family, Ismaili notables, Kutama chieftains, as well as the Fatimid treasuries and coffins of his predecessors, al-Muʿizz crossed the Nile and took possession of his new capital in Ramadan 362/June 973. In Egypt, al-Muʿizz was mainly preoccupied with the establishment of Fatimid governance, in addition to repelling further Qarmati incursions. Having transformed the Fatimid *dawla* from a regional power into an expanding and stable empire with a newly activated *daʿwa* apparatus, al-Muʿizz died in 365/975.

Cairo served from early on as the central headquarters of the Fatimid Ismaili *daʿwa* organization that developed over time and reached its peak under the eighth Fatimid caliph-imam, al-Mustansir (427–487/1036–1094). The religio-political message of the *daʿwa* continued to be disseminated both within and outside the Fatimid state through an expanding network of *daʿis*. The term *daʿwa*, it may be noted, referred to both the organization of the Ismaili mission, with its elaborate hierarchical ranks or *hudud*, and the functioning of that organization, including especially the missionary activities of the *daʿi*s who were the representatives of the *daʿwa* in different regions.

The organization and functioning of the Ismaili *daʿwa* are among the least known aspects of Fatimid Ismailism. The Ismaili literature of the Fatimid period recovered in modern times has shed only limited

light on this subject. Information is particularly meagre regarding the *daʿwa* and the activities of the *daʿi*s in hostile regions outside the Fatimid *dawla*, such as Iraq, Persia, Central Asia and India, where the *daʿi*s, fearful of persecution, were continuously obliged to observe *taqiyya* and secrecy in their operations. All this once again explains why Ismaili literature is generally so poor in historiographical details on the activities of the *daʿi*s – information that in Fatimid times may have been available only to the central headquarters of the Ismaili *daʿwa*, headed by the person of the imam. However, modern scholarship in Ismaili studies, drawing on a variety of Ismaili and non-Ismaili sources, including histories of Egypt, has now finally succeeded to piece together a relatively reliable sketch of the Fatimid Ismaili *daʿwa* with some of its major practices and institutions.

The Fatimids, as noted, aspired to be recognized as rightful imams by the entire Muslim *umma*; they also aimed to extend their actual rule over all Muslim lands and beyond. These were, indeed, the central objectives of their *daʿwa* which continued to be designated as *al-daʿwa al-hadiya*, the rightly guiding summons to mankind to follow the Fatimid Ismaili imam. The word *daʿi,* literally meaning 'summoner', was used by several Muslim groups and movements, including the early Shiʿi *ghulat*, the Abbasids, the Muʿtazila and the Zaydiyya, in reference to their religio-political missionaries or propagandists. But the term acquired its widest application in connection with the Ismaʿiliyya, while the early Ismailis and Qarmatis in Persia and elsewhere sometimes used other designations such as *janah* (plural, *ajniha*) instead of *daʿi*. It should also be noted that at least from Fatimid times several categories of *daʿi*s existed in any region. Be that as it may, the term *daʿi* (plural, *duʿat*) was applied generically to any authorized representative of the Fatimid *daʿwa*, a missionary responsible for propagating Ismailism through winning new converts and followers for the Ismaili imam of the time. As the provision of instruction in Ismaili doctrine for the initiates was from early on an important responsibility of the *daʿwa*, the *daʿi* was also entrusted with the religious education of the new converts or *mustajib*s. Furthermore, the Ismaili *daʿi* served as the unofficial agent of the Fatimid *dawla*, and promoted secretly the Fatimid cause wherever he operated. The earliest record of this aspect of the *daʿi*'s activity is best

exemplified in the achievements of the *daʿi* Abu ʿAbd Allah al-Shiʿi (d. 298/911) in North Africa. Within Fatimid dominions, the Ismaili *daʿwa* was protected by the Fatimid *dawla* and doubtless some collaborative relationship must have existed between them as both were headed by the person of the caliph-imam.[10]

Despite his all-important role, however, very little seems to have been written on the *daʿi* by the Ismaili authors of Fatimid times. The prolific al-Qadi al-Nuʿman, head of the *daʿwa* for some time, devoted only a few pages to the virtues of an ideal *daʿi*.[11] He merely emphasizes that the *daʿwa* was above all a teaching activity and that the *daʿis* were teachers who promoted their message also through their own exemplary knowledge and behaviour. A more detailed discussion of the attributes of an ideal *daʿi* is contained in the only known Ismaili work on the subject written by the *daʿi*-author Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Nisaburi, al-Nuʿman's younger contemporary.[12] According to al-Nisaburi, a *daʿi* could be appointed only by the imam's permission (*idhn*). The *daʿi*s, especially those operating in remote lands outside Fatimid dominions, seem to have enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, and they evidently received only their general directives from the central *daʿwa* headquarters. In these generally hostile regions, the *daʿi*s operated very secretly, finding it rather difficult to establish frequent contacts with the *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo.

Under these circumstances, only Ismailis of high educational qualifications combined with proper moral and intellectual attributes could become *daʿi*s leading Ismaili communities in particular localities. The *daʿi*s were expected to have sufficient knowledge of both the *zahir* and the *batin* dimensions of religion, or the apparent meanings of the Qur'an and the *shariʿa* and their Ismaili esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*). In non-Fatimid lands, the *daʿi* also acted as a judge in communal disputes and his decisions were binding for the members of the local Ismaili community. Thus, the *daʿi* was often trained in legal sciences as well. The *daʿi* was expected to be adequately familiar with the teachings of non-Muslim religions, in addition to knowing the languages and customs of the region in which he functioned. All these qualifications were required for the orderly performance of the *daʿi*'s duties. As a result, a great number of *daʿi*s were highly learned and cultured scholars and made important contributions to Islamic

thought. They also produced the bulk of the Ismaili literature of the Fatimid period in Arabic, dealing with a diversity of exoteric and esoteric subjects ranging from jurisprudence and theology to philosophy and esoteric exegesis.[13] Nasir-i Khusraw was the only major Fatimid *daʿi* to have written his books in Persian.

Like other aspects of the *daʿwa*, few details are available on the actual methods used by the Fatimid *daʿis* for winning and educating new converts. Always avoiding mass proselytization, the *daʿi* had to be personally acquainted with the prospective initiates, who were selected with special regard to their intellectual abilities and talents. Many Sunni sources, influenced by anti-Ismaili polemical writings, mention a seven-stage process of initiation (*balagh*) into Ismailism, and even provide different names for each stage in a process that allegedly led the novice to the ultimate stage of irreligiosity and unbelief.[14] There is no evidence for any fixed graded system in the extant Ismaili literature, although a certain degree of gradualism in the initiation and education of converts was pedagogically unavoidable. Indeed, al-Nisaburi relates that the *daʿi* was expected to instruct the *mustajib* in a gradual fashion, not divulging too much at any given time; the act of initiation itself was perceived by the Ismailis as the spiritual rebirth of the adept.

It was the duty of the *daʿi* to administer to the initiate an oath of allegiance (*ʿahd* or *mithaq*) to the Ismaili imam of the time. As part of this oath, the initiate also pledged to maintain secrecy in Ismaili doctrines taught to him by the *daʿi*. Only after this oath the *daʿi* began instructing the *mustajib*, usually in regular 'teaching sessions' held at his house for a number of such adepts. The funds required by the *daʿi* for the performance of his various duties were raised locally from the members of his community. The *daʿi* kept a portion of the funds collected on behalf of the imam, including the *zakat*, the *khums* and certain Ismaili-specific dues like the *najwa*, to finance his local operations and sent the remainder to the imam through reliable couriers. The latter, especially those going to Cairo from remote *daʿwa* regions, also brought back Ismaili books for the *daʿis*. The Fatimid *daʿis* were, thus, kept well informed on the intellectual developments within Ismaili thought, especially those endorsed by the *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo.

The scholarly qualifications required of the *da'is* and the Fatimids' high esteem for learning resulted in a number of distinctive traditions and institutions under the Fatimids. The *da'wa* was, as noted, concerned with the religious education of the Ismailis, who had to be duly instructed in Ismaili esoteric doctrine or *hikma*. For that purpose, a variety of 'teaching sessions', generally designated as *majalis* (singular, *majlis*), were organized. These sessions, addressed to different audiences, were formalized by the time of the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Hakim (386–411/996–1021).[15] The lectures on Ismaili doctrine, the *majalis al-hikma*, as noted, were initiated in North Africa by the *da'i* Abu 'Abd Allah al-Shi'i, and then systematized by al-Qadi al-Nu'man. In the Fatimid state, from early on, the private *majalis al-hikma*, organized for the exclusive benefit of the Ismaili initiates, were held separately for men and women. These lectures, delivered by the chief *da'i* (*da'i al-du'at*) who was often also the chief *qadi* (*qadi al-qudat*) of the Fatimid state, required the prior approval of the Fatimid caliph-imam. There were also public lectures on Ismaili law. The legal doctrines of the Ismaili *madhhab*, adopted as the official system of religious law in the Fatimid state, were applied by the Fatimid judiciary, headed by the chief *qadi*. But the Ismaili legal code, governing the juridical basis of the daily life of the Muslim subjects of the Fatimid state, was new and its precepts had to be explained to Ismaili as well as non-Ismaili Muslims. As a result, public sessions on the *shari'a* as interpreted by Ismaili jurisprudence, were held by al-Qadi al-Nu'man and his successors as chief *qadi*s, after the Friday midday prayers, in the Fatimid capital. In Cairo, the public sessions on Ismaili law were held at al-Azhar and other great mosques there. On these occasions, excerpts from al-Nu'man's *Da'a'im al-Islam* and other legal works were read to large audiences.

On the other hand, the private *majalis al-hikma* continued to be held in the Fatimid palace in Cairo for the Ismaili initiates who had already taken the oath of allegiance and secrecy. Many of these *majalis*, normally prepared by or for the chief *da'i*, were in time collected in writing. This distinctive Fatimid tradition of learning found its culmination in the *Majalis* or collected lectures of al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi (d. 470/1078), chief *da'i* for almost twenty years under al-Mustansir. Fatimid *da'i*s working outside Fatimid dominions seem

to have held similar 'teaching sessions' for the education of the Ismaili initiates. In non-Fatimid territories, the Ismailis observed the law of the land wherever they lived, while taking their personal disputes to local Ismaili *daʿi*s. The Fatimids paid particular attention to the training of their *daʿi*s, including those operating outside the confines of the Fatimid state. Among the Fatimid institutions of learning mention should be made of the Dar al-'Ilm (House of Knowledge), founded in 395/1005 by al-Hakim in Cairo. A wide variety of religious and non-religious sciences were taught at this institution which was also equipped with a major library. Many Fatimid *daʿis* received at least part of their education at the Dar al-'Ilm, where non-Ismailis also taught and studied.[16] In later Fatimid times, the Dar al-'Ilm seems to have become increasingly oriented to serve the needs of the *daʿwa*.

The Fatimid *daʿwa* was organized hierarchically under the overall guidance of the Ismaili imam, who authorized its general policies. It should be noted that the *daʿwa* hierarchy or *hudud* mentioned in various Fatimid texts and discussed below appears to have had reference to an idealized situation, when the Ismaili imam would rule the entire world. Consequently, the *daʿwa* ranks mentioned in these sources were not actually filled at all times and in all regions; some of them were probably never filled at all. The chief *daʿi* (*daʿi al-duʿat*) acted as the administrative head of the *daʿwa* organization. He appointed the provincial *daʿis* of the Fatimid state, who were stationed in the main cities of the Fatimid provinces, including Damascus, Tyre, Acre, Ascalon and Ramla, as well as in some rural areas. These *daʿis* represented the *daʿwa* and the chief *daʿi*, operating alongside the provincial *qadis* who represented the Fatimid *qadi al-qudat*. The chief *daʿi* also played a part in selecting the *daʿis* of non-Fatimid territories. Not much else is known about the functions of the chief *daʿi*, who was closely supervised by the imam. As noted, he was also responsible for organizing the *majalis al-hikma*; and in Fatimid ceremonial, he ranked second after the chief *qadi*, if both positions were not held by the same person.[17] The title of *daʿi al-duʿat* itself, used in non-Ismaili sources, rarely appears in the Ismaili texts of the Fatimid period which, instead, usually use the term *bab* (or *bab al-abwab*), implying gateway to the imam's 'wisdom', in reference to the administrative head of the *daʿwa* organization. The *daʿi* Hamid

al-Din al-Kirmani makes particular allusions to the position of *bab* and his closeness to the imam.[18]

The organization of the Fatimid *daʿwa*, with its hierarchy of ranks, developed over time and reached its full elaboration under the caliph-imam al-Mustansir.[19] There are different references to the *daʿwa* ranks (*hudud*) after the imam and his *bab*. According to the idealized scheme, the world, specifically the regions outside Fatimid dominions, was divided into twelve *jazira*s or 'islands' for *daʿwa* purposes; each *jazira* representing a separate *daʿwa* region. Delineated on the basis of a combination of geographic and ethnographic considerations, the 'islands', collectively designated as the 'islands of the earth' (*jazaʾir al-ard*), included Rum (Byzantium), Daylam, standing for Persia, Sind, Hind (India), Sin (China), and the regions inhabited by Arabs, Nubians, Khazars, Slavs (Saqaliba), Berbers, Africans (Zanj), and Abyssinians (Habash).[20] Other classifications of the 'islands', too, seem to have been observed in practice. For instance, Nasir-i Khusraw refers to Khurasan as a *jazira* under his own jurisdiction; and this claim is corroborated by the well-informed Ibn Hawqal, who further adds that Baluchistan, in eastern Persia, belonged to that *jazira*.[21] In this sense, Khurasan seems to have included neighbouring regions in today's Afghanistan and Central Asia. Among other regions functioning as *jazira*s of the Fatimid *daʿwa*, mention may be made of Yaman as well as Iraq and western Persia, for a time headed by the *daʿi* al-Kirmani.

Each *jazira* was placed under the overall charge of a high ranking *daʿi* known specifically as *hujja* (proof, guarantor), also called *naqib, lahiq* or *yad* (hand) in early Fatimid times. The *hujja* was the highest representative of the *daʿwa* in any 'island', and he was assisted by a number of subordinate *daʿis* of different ranks operating in the localities under his jurisdiction. These included *daʿi al-balagh*, *al-daʿi al-mutlaq*, and *al-daʿi al-mahdud* (or *al-mahsur*). There may have been as many as thirty such *daʿi*s in some *jazira*s.[22] The particular responsibilities of different *daʿi*s are not clarified in the meagre sources. It seems, however, that *daʿi al-balagh* acted as liaison between the central *daʿwa* headquarters in the Fatimid capital and the *hujja*'s headquarters in his *jazira*, and *al-daʿi al-mutlaq* evidently became the chief functionary of the *daʿwa*, operating with absolute authority

in the absence of the *hujja* and his *daʿi al-balagh*. The regional *daʿis*, in turn, had their assistants, entitled *al-maʾdhun*, the licentiate. The sources mention at least two categories of this rank (*hadd*), namely, *al-maʾdhun al-mutlaq*, and *al-maʾdhun al-mahdud* (or *al-mahsur*), eventually called *al-mukasir*. The *maʾdhun al-mutlaq* often became a *daʿi* himself; he was authorized as the chief licentiate to administer the oath of initiation and explain the rules and policies of the *daʿwa* to the initiates, while the *mukasir* (literally, 'breaker') was mainly responsible for attracting prospective converts and breaking their attachments to other religions. The ordinary Ismaili initiates, the *mustajib*s or respondents who referred to themselves as the *awliya' Allah* or 'friends of God', did not occupy a rank (*hadd*) at the bottom of the *daʿwa* hierarchy. Belonging to the *ahl al-daʿwa* (people of the mission), they represented the elite, the *khawass*, as compared to the common Muslims, designated as the *ʿammat al-Muslimin* or the *ʿawamm*. The ranks of the Fatimid *daʿwa*, numbering to seven from *bab* (or *daʿi al-duʿat*) to *mukasir*, together with their functions and their corresponding celestial hierarchy, are elaborated by the *daʿi* al-Kirmani.[23]

The Fatimid *daʿwa* was propagated openly throughout the Fatimid state enjoying the protection of the government apparatus. But the success of the *daʿwa* within Fatimid dominions was both limited and transitory, with the major exception of Syria where different Shiʿi traditions had deep roots. During the North African phase of the Fatimid caliphate, Ismailism retained its minoritarian status in Ifriqiya and other Fatimid territories in the Maghrib, where the spread of the *daʿwa* was effectively checked by Maliki Sunnism and Kharijism. By 440/1048, Ismailism had virtually disappeared from the former Fatimid dominions in North Africa, where the Ismailis were severely persecuted after the departure of the Fatimids. In Fatimid Egypt, too, the Ismailis always remained a minority community. It was outside the Fatimid state, in the *jazira*s, that the Fatimid Ismaili *daʿwa* achieved its greatest and most lasting success. Many of these 'islands' in the Islamic world, scattered from Yaman to Transoxania, were well acquainted with a diversity of Shiʿi traditions, and large numbers in these regions responded to the summons of the Ismaili *daʿi*s. By the time of the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mustansir, significant Ismaili

communities representing a united movement had appeared in many of the *jazira*s. By then, the dissident Qarmatis had either disintegrated or joined the dynamic Fatimid *daʿwa*.

In Iraq and Persia, the Fatimid *daʿi*s had systematically intensified their activities from the time of the sixth Fatimid caliph-imam, al-Hakim. Aiming to undermine the Abbasids, they concentrated their efforts on a number of influential tribal amirs in Iraq, at the very centre of Abbasid power. Foremost among the *daʿi*s of al-Hakim's reign was Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani (d. after 411/1020), perhaps the most learned Ismaili scholar of the entire Fatimid period. Designated as the *hujjat al-ʿIraqayn*, as he spent a good part of his life as a chief *daʿi* in both the Arab Iraq and the west-central parts of Persia, al-Kirmani succeeded in converting several local chieftains in Iraq, including the ʿUqaylid amir of Kufa and several other towns who acknowledged Fatimid suzerainty. It was in reaction to the success of the *daʿwa* in Iraq that the Abbasid caliph al-Qadir (381–422/991–1031) launched a series of military campaigns against the refractories as well as an anti-Fatimid literary campaign, culminating in the Baghdad manifesto of 402/1011 denouncing the Fatimids and refuting their ʿAlid genealogy.[24] This manifesto was read from the pulpits throughout the Abbasid caliphate. It was also the learned *daʿi* al-Kirmani who was invited to Cairo to refute, on behalf of the *daʿwa* headquarters, the extremist doctrines then being expounded by the founders of the Druze movement.

The *daʿwa* continued to be propounded successfully in Iraq, Persia and other eastern lands even after the ardently Sunni Saljuqs had replaced the Shiʿi Buyids as the real masters of the Abbasid caliphate in 447/1055. Important Ismaili communities were now in existence in Fars, Kirman, Isfahan and many other parts of Persia. In Fars, the *daʿwa* had achieved particular success through the efforts of the *daʿi* al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi, who had penetrated the ruling Buyid circles. After converting Abu Kalijar Marzuban (415–440/1024–1048), the Buyid amir of Fars and Khuzistan, and many of his courtiers, however, al-Mu'ayyad was advised to flee in order to escape Abbasid persecution. Subsequently, he settled in Cairo, where he played an active part in the affairs of the Fatimid *dawla* as well as the Ismaili *daʿwa* which he headed for twenty years from 450/1058 until shortly before

his death in 470/1078. As revealed in his autobiography, al-Mu'ayyad played a crucial role as an intermediary between the Fatimid regime and the Turkish commander al-Basasiri who championed the Fatimid cause in Iraq against the Saljuqs and the Abbasids.[25] In fact, al-Basasiri, with Fatimid help and al-Mu'ayyad's strategic guidance, seized several towns in Iraq and entered Baghdad itself at the end of 450/1058. In the Abbasid capital the *khutba* was now pronounced for al-Mustansir until al-Basasiri was defeated a year later. That Fatimid suzerainty was recognized in Abbasid Iraq – albeit for only one year – attests to the success of the *daʿi* al-Mu'ayyad and the *daʿwa* activities there. Al-Mu'ayyad established close relations between the *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo and the local headquarters in several *jazira*s, especially those located in Yaman and the Iranian lands.

In Persia proper, the Ismaili *daʿwa* had continued to spread in the midst of Saljuq dominions. By the 460s/1070s, the Persian Ismailis were under the overall leadership of a chief *daʿi*, ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAttash, who established his secret headquarters in Isfahan, the main Saljuq capital. A religious scholar of renown and a capable organizer in his own right, ʿAbd al-Malik was also responsible for launching the career of Hasan-i Sabbah, his future successor and the founder of the independent Nizari Ismaili *daʿwa* and state. Further east, in certain parts of Khurasan, Badakhshan and adjacent areas in Transoxania, the *daʿwa* continued to be active with various degrees of success after the downfall of the Samanids in 395/1005.[26] Despite incessant persecutions by the Ghaznawids and other Turkish dynasties ruling over those regions of the Iranian world, Nasir-i Khusraw and other *daʿi*s managed to win the allegiance of an increasing number to the Fatimid Ismaili imam.

A learned theologian and philosopher, and one of the foremost poets of the Persian language, Nasir-i Khusraw spread the *daʿwa* throughout Khurasan from around 444/1052, after returning from his well-documented voyage to Fatimid Egypt. As the *hujja* of Khurasan, he originally established his secret base of operations in his native Balkh (near today's Mazar-i Sharif in northern Afghanistan). A few years later, Sunni hostilities obliged him to take permanent refuge in the valley of Yumgan in Badakhshan. There, enjoying the protection of a local Ismaili amir, Nasir spent the rest of his life in the service

of the *daʿwa.* It is interesting to note that even from his exile in the midst of the remote Pamirs, Nasir maintained his contacts with the *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo, then still headed by the chief *daʿi* al-Muʾayyad. In fact, the lifelong friendship between al-Muʾayyad and Nasir-i Khusraw dates to 439/1047 when both of these distinguished Persian Ismailis arrived in the Fatimid capital. On that occasion, Nasir stayed in Cairo for three years furthering his Ismaili education.[27] It was evidently Nasir-i Khusraw who extended the *daʿwa* in Badakhshan, now divided by the Oxus between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. At any rate, the modern-day Ismailis of Badakhshan, and their offshoot communities in Hunza and other northern areas of Pakistan, all regard Nasir-i Khusraw as the founder of their Ismaili communities. Nasir-i Khusraw died not long after 462/1070, and his mausoleum is still preserved near Faydabad, the capital of Afghan Badakhshan.

In Fatimid times, Nasir-i Khusraw was also the last major proponent of 'philosophical Ismailism', a distinctive intellectual tradition elaborated by the *daʿis* of the Iranian lands during the Fatimid period. On the basis of the pseudo-Aristotelian texts circulating in the Muslim world, these *daʿis* elaborated complex metaphysical systems combining Ismaili Shiʿi theology with a diversity of philosophical traditions, notably Neoplatonism.[28] The *daʿi*s of the Iranian lands, perhaps in reflection of their *daʿwa* policy, wrote for the educated strata of society, aiming to appeal intellectually to the ruling elite. This may explain why these *daʿi*s, starting with al-Nasafi, expressed their theology in terms of the then most fashionable philosophical themes and vocabulary. This tradition has only recently been studied by modern scholars mainly on the basis of the numerous extant works of al-Sijistani, while Nasir-i Khusraw's contributions still remain largely unexplored. Be that as it may, these *daʿis* of the Iranian lands elaborated the earliest tradition of philosophical theology in Shiʿi Islam without actually compromising the essence of their message which revolved around the Shiʿi doctrine of the imamate.

The Ismaili *daʿwa* achieved one of its major successes of the Fatimid times in Yaman, where Ismailism had survived in a subdued form after the initial efforts of the *daʿi*s Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman (d. 302/914) and Ibn al-Fadl (d. 303/915). By the time of

al-Mustansir, the leadership of the *daʿwa* in Yaman had come to be vested in the *daʿi* ʿAli b. Muhammad al-Sulayhi, a chieftain of the influential Banu Hamdan. In 439/1047, ʿAli succeeded in establishing the Sulayhid state in the mountainous region of Haraz. By 455/1063, he had subjugated almost all of Yaman, enabling the *daʿwa* to be propagated openly in his dominions.[29] The Sulayhids recognized the suzerainty of the Fatimids and ruled over various parts of Yaman for more than a century. ʿAli al-Sulayhi headed the Ismaili *daʿwa* as well as the Sulayhid state in Yaman, an arrangement that changed in subsequent times. The Sulayhids established close relations with the Fatimid *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo, when al-Mu'ayyad was the chief *daʿi* there. After ʿAli, who was murdered in a tribal vendetta in 459/1067, his son Ahmad al-Mukarram succeeded as sultan to the leadership of the Sulayhid state, while the *daʿi* Lamak b. Malik al-Hammadi (d. 491/1098) acted as the executive head of the Yamani *daʿwa*.

From the latter part of Ahmad al-Mukarram's reign (459–477/1067–1084), when the Sulayhids lost much of northern Yaman to the Zaydis, effective authority in the Sulayhid state was exercised by his consort, al-Malika al-Sayyida Hurra, a most remarkable queen and Ismaili leader.[30] She played an increasingly important role in the affairs of the Yamani *daʿwa* culminating in her appointment as the *hujja* of Yaman by al-Mustansir. This represented the first designation of a woman to a high rank in the Fatimid *daʿwa* hierarchy. Al-Mustansir also charged her with the affairs of the *daʿwa* in western India. The Sulayhids played a major part in the renewed efforts of the Fatimids to spread Ismaili Shiʿism on the Indian subcontinent, an objective related to the Fatimid trade interests. At any rate, from around 460/1067, Yamani *daʿis* were despatched to Gujarat under the close supervision of the Sulayhids. These *daʿis* founded a new Ismaili community in Gujarat which in time grew into the present Tayyibi Bohra community.

By the early decades of al-Mustansir's long reign (427–487/1036–1094), the Fatimid caliphate had already embarked on its political decline. In rapid succession, the Fatimids now lost almost all of their possessions outside Egypt proper, with the exception of a few coastal towns in the Levant. Al-Mustansir's death in 487/1094 and

the ensuing dispute over his succession led to a major schism in the Ismaili *daʿwa* as well, aggravating the deteriorating situation of the Fatimid regime. Al-Mustansir's eldest surviving son and heir designate, Nizar, was deprived of his succession rights by the scheming and ambitious al-Afdal, who a few months earlier had succeeded his own father Badr al-Jamali (d. 487/1094) as the all-powerful Fatimid vizier and 'commander of the armies' (*amir al-juyush*). Al-Afdal installed Nizar's much younger half-brother Ahmad to the Fatimid caliphate with the title of al-Mustaʿli bi'llah, and he immediately obtained for him the allegiance of the *daʿwa* leaders in Cairo. In protest, Nizar rose in revolt in Alexandria, but was defeated and executed soon afterwards in 488/1095. These events permanently split the Ismaili *daʿwa* and community into two rival factions, designated as Mustaʿliyya and Nizariyya after al-Mustansir's sons who had claimed his heritage. The imamate of al-Mustaʿli was recognized by the *daʿwa* organization in Cairo, henceforth serving as central headquarters of the Mustaʿli Ismaili *daʿwa* and by the Ismailis of Egypt, Yaman and western India, who depended on the Fatimid establishment. In Syria, too, the bulk of the Ismailis seem to have initially joined the Mustaʿli camp. The situation was drastically different in the eastern Islamic lands where the Fatimids no longer exercised any political influence after the Basasiri episode.

By 487/1094, Hasan-i Sabbah, a most capable strategist and organizer, had emerged as chief *daʿi* of the Ismailis of Persia and, probably, of all Saljuq territories. Earlier, Hasan had spent three years in Egypt, furthering his Ismaili education and closely observing the difficulties of the Fatimid state. On his return to Persia in 473/1081, Hasan operated as a Fatimid *daʿi* in different Persian provinces while developing his own ideas for organizing an open revolt against the Saljuqs. The revolt was launched in 483/1090 by Hasan's seizure of the mountain fortress of Alamut in northern Persia, which henceforth served as his headquarters. At the time of al-Mustansir's succession dispute, Hasan was already following an independent revolutionary policy; and he did not hesitate to uphold Nizar's rights and break off his relations with the Mustaʿli-dominated Fatimid establishment and the *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo. This decision, fully supported by the entire Ismaili communities of Persia and Iraq, in fact marked the foundation

of the independent Nizari Ismaili *daʿwa* on behalf of the Nizari imam who was then inaccessible. Hasan-i Sabbah also succeeded in creating a state, centred at Alamut, with vast territories and an intricate network of fortresses scattered in different parts of Persia as well as in Syria. Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 518/1124) and his next two successors at Alamut, Kiya Buzurg-Ummid and his son Muhammad, ruled as *daʿis* and *hujjas* representing the absent Nizari imam. By 559/1164, the Nizari imams themselves emerged openly at Alamut and took charge of the affairs of their *daʿwa* and state.[31] The Nizari state lasted for some 166 years until it too was uprooted by the Mongol hordes in 654/1256. However, the Nizari Ismaili *daʿwa* and community survived the Mongol catastrophe.

In the meantime, Mustaʿli Ismailism had witnessed an internal schism of its own with seminal consequences. On al-Mustaʿli premature death in 495/1101, all Mustaʿli Ismailis recognized al-Amir, his son and successor to the Fatimid caliphate, as their imam. Due to the close relations then still existing between Sulayhid Yaman and Fatimid Egypt, the queen al-Sayyida, too, acknowledged al-Amir's imamate. The assassination of al-Amir in 524/1130 confronted the Mustaʿli *daʿwa* and communities with a major crisis. By then, the Fatimid caliphate was disintegrating rapidly, while the Sulayhid state was beset by its own mounting difficulties. It was under such circumstances that on al-Amir's death power was assumed as regent in the Fatimid state by his cousin ʿAbd al-Majid, while al-Amir's infant son and designated successor al-Tayyib had disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Shortly afterwards in 526/1132, ʿAbd al-Majid successfully claimed the Fatimid caliphate as well as the imamate of the Mustaʿli Ismailis with the title of al-Hafiz li-Din Allah. The irregular accession of al-Hafiz was endorsed, as in the case of al-Mustaʿli, by the *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo; and, therefore, it also received the support of the Mustaʿli communities of Egypt and Syria. These Mustaʿli Ismailis, recognizing al-Hafiz (d. 544/1149) and the later Fatimid caliphs as their imams, became known as the Hafiziyya.

In Yaman, too, some Mustaʿlis, led by the Zurayʿids of ʿAdan who had won their independence from the Sulayhids, supported the Hafizi *daʿwa*. On the other hand, the aged Sulayhid queen al-Sayyida, who had already drifted apart from the Fatimid regime, upheld the

rights of al-Tayyib and recognized him as al-Amir's successor to the imamate. Consequently, she severed her ties with Fatimid Cairo, much in the same way as her contemporary Hasan-i Sabbah had done a few decades earlier on al-Mustansir's death. Her decision was fully endorsed by the Mustaʿli community of Gujarat. The Sulayhid queen herself continued to take care of the Yamani *daʿwa* supporting al-Tayyib's imamate, later designated as Tayyibiyya. Until her death in 532/1138, al-Sayyida worked systematically for the consolidation of the Tayyibi *daʿwa*. In fact, soon after 526/1132 she appointed al-Dhu'ayb b. Musa al-Wadiʿi (d. 546/1151) as *al-daʿi al-mutlaq*, or the *daʿi* with absolute authority over the affairs of the Yamani *daʿwa*. This marked the foundation of the independent Tayyibi Mustaʿli *daʿwa* on behalf of al-Tayyib and his successors to the Tayyibi imamate, all of whom have remained inaccessible.[32] The Tayyibi *daʿwa* was, thus, made independent of the Fatimids as well as the Sulayhids; and as such, it survived the downfall of both dynasties. The Tayyibi *daʿwa* was initially led for several centuries from Yaman by al-Dhu'ayb's successors as *daʿi*s. In subsequent times, the stronghold of Tayyibi Ismailism was transferred to the Indian subcontinent and the community subdivided into several groups; the two major (Da'udi and Sulaymani) groups still possess the authorities of their separate lines of *daʿi mutlaq*s while awaiting the emergence of their imam. The Tayyibi Ismailis have also preserved a good share of the Ismaili literature of the Fatimid period.

On 7 Muharram 567/10 September 1171, Saladin, ironically the last Fatimid vizier, formally ended Fatimid rule by instituting the *khutba* in Cairo in the name of the reigning Abbasid caliph. At the time, al-ʿAdid, destined to be the seal of the Fatimid dynasty, lay dying in his palace. The Fatimid *dawla* collapsed uneventfully after 262 years amidst the complete apathy of the Egyptian populace. Saladin, the champion of Sunni 'orthodoxy' and the future founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, then adopted swift measures to persecute the Ismailis of Egypt and suppress their *daʿwa* and rituals, all representing the Hafizi form of Ismailism. Indeed, Ismailism soon disappeared completely and irrevocably from Egypt, where it had enjoyed the protection of the Fatimid *dawla*. In Yaman, too, the Hafizi *daʿwa* did not survive the Fatimid caliphate on which it was dependent. On the other hand,

by 567/1171 Nizari and Tayyibi *daʿwa*s and communities had acquired permanent strongholds in Persia, Syria, Yaman and Gujarat. Later, all Central Asian Ismailis as well as an important Khoja community in India also acknowledged the Nizari *daʿwa*. That Ismailism survived at all the downfall of the Fatimid dynasty was, thus, mainly due to the astonishing record of success achieved by the Ismaili *daʿwa* of Fatimid times outside the confines of the Fatimid *dawla*.

Notes

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1. See F. Daftary, 'The Earliest Ismaʿilis', *Arabica*, 38 (1991), pp. 214–245; reprinted in E. Kohlberg, *Shiʿism* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 235–266.

2. See, for example, Abu Jaʿfar Muhammad b. Yaʿqub al-Kulayni, *al-Usul min al-kafi*, ed. ʿA.A. al-Ghaffari (Tehran, 1388/1968), vol. 1, pp. 168–548.

3. On the schism of 286/899 in Ismailism, and the subsequent hostile relations between the Fatimids and the Qarmatis, see W. Madelung, 'The Fatimids and the Qarmatis of Bahrayn', in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Ismaʿili History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 21–73; F. Daftary, 'A Major Schism in the Early Ismaʿili Movement', *Studia Islamica*, 77 (1993), pp. 123–139, and his 'Carmatians', *EIR*, vol. 4, pp. 823–832.

4. The propagation of the Ismaili *daʿwa* in North Africa, culminating in the establishment of the Fatimid State, is treated in al-Qadi Abu Hanifa al-Nuʿman b. Muhammad's *Iftitah al-daʿwa*, ed. W. al-Qadi (Beirut, 1970), pp. 71–222; ed. F. Dachraoui (Tunis, 1975), pp. 47–257. See also F. Dachraoui, *Le Califat Fatimide au Maghreb*, 296–365 H./909–975 Jc. (Tunis, 1981), pp. 57–122; F. Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 134ff., 144–173, and H. Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids*, tr. M. Bonner (Leiden, 1996), pp. 9–128. Now also see Ibn al-Haytham's *Kitab al-munazarat*, ed. and tr. W. Madelung and Paul E. Walker as *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shiʿi Witness* (London, 2000).

5. See al-Qadi al-Nuʿman, *Daʿa'im al-Islam*, ed. A.A.A. Fyzee (Cairo, 1951–61), vol. 1, pp. 1–98; partial English trans., *The Book of Faith*, tr. A.A.A. Fyzee (Bombay, 1974), pp. 4–111; complete English trans., *The Pillars of Islam*: Volume I, *Acts of Devotion and Religious Observances*, tr. Asaf A.A. Fyzee, revised by Ismail K. Poonawala (New Delhi, 2002), pp. 18–22. See also A. Nanji, 'An Ismaʿili Theory of *Walayah* in the *Daʿa'im al-Islam* of Qadi al-Nuʿman', in

D.P. Little, ed., *Essays on Islamic Civilization Presented to Niyazi Berkes* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 260–273, and I.K. Poonawala, 'Al-Qadi al-Nu'man and Isma'ili Jurisprudence', in Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History*, pp. 117–143.

6. S.M. Stern, 'Heterodox Isma'ilism at the Time of al-Mu'izz', *BSOAS*, 17 (1955), pp. 10–33; reprinted in his *Studies in Early Isma'ilism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983), pp. 257–288; W. Madelung, 'Das Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre', *Der Islam*, 37 (1961), pp. 86–101, and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, p. 176–180, where additional sources are cited.

7. On these developments, see S. M. Stern, 'The Earliest Cosmological Doctrines of Isma'ilism', in his *Studies*, pp. 3–29; H. Halm, 'The Cosmology of the Pre-Fatimid Isma'iliyya', in Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History*, pp. 75–83, and Paul E. Walker, *Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani: Intellectual Missionary* (London, 1996), pp. 26–103.

8. S.M. Stern, 'Isma'ili Propaganda and Fatimid Rule in Sind', *Islamic Culture*, 23 (1949), pp. 298–307; reprinted in his *Studies*, pp. 177–188; A. Hamdani, *The Beginnings of the Isma'ili Da'wa in Northern India* (Cairo, 1956), pp. 3–16, and Halm, *Empire of the Mahdi*, pp. 385–392.

9. The gradual establishment and decline of Fatimid rule in Syria is treated at length in Thierry Bianquis, *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination Fatimide (359–468/969–1076)* (Damascus, 1986–89), 2 vols.

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11. Al-Qadi al-Nu'man, *Kitab al-himma fi adab atba' al-a'imma*, ed. M. Kamil Husayn (Cairo, 1948), pp. 136–140.

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19. See S.M. Stern, 'Cairo as the Centre of the Ismaʿili Movement', in *Colloque international sur l'histoire du Caire* (Cairo, 1972), pp. 437–450; reprinted in his *Studies*, pp. 234–256; Paul E. Walker, 'The Ismaili Daʿwa in the Reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 30 (1993), pp. 161–182; Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis*, pp. 224–232, and his 'Daʿi', *EIR*, vol. 6, pp. 590–593.

20. Al-Sijistani, *Ithbat*, p. 172; al-Qadi al-Nuʿman, *Ta'wil al-daʿa'im*, ed. M.H. al-Aʿzami (Cairo, 1967–72), vol. 2, p. 74, and vol. 3, pp. 48–49.

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22. Nasir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, ed. G.R. Aʿvani (Tehran, 1977), p. 178.

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24. Al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az al-hunafa'*, ed. J. al-Shayyal and M. Hilmi M. Ahmad (Cairo, 1967–73), vol. 1, pp. 43–44, and Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, tr. F. Rosenthal (2nd ed., Princeton, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 45–46.

25. Al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi, *Sirat al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din da'i al-du'at*, ed. M. Kamil Husayn (Cairo, 1949), especially pp. 94–184, and Klemm, *Die Mission*, pp. 2–63, 136–192.

26. For details, see al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, vol. 2, pp. 191–192; Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi'l-ta'rikh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg (Leiden, 1851–76), vol. 9, pp. 211, 358; vol. 10, pp. 122 ff., 165–166, and W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, ed. C.E. Bosworth (4th ed., London, 1977), pp. 251, 304–305, 316–318.

27. Nasir-i Khusraw describes the splendour and prosperity of the Fatimid capital most vividly in his famous *Safar-nama*, ed. M. Dabir Siyaqi (Tehran, 1356 Sh./1977), pp. 74–99; English trans. *Naser-e Khosraw's Book of Travels (Safarnama)*, tr. W.M. Thackston Jr. (Albany, NY, 1986), pp. 44–57. Now also see Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan* (London, 2000), pp. 140–173.

28. For details of the metaphysical systems of the Iranian *da'i*s, as elaborated especially in the works of al-Sijistani, see P.E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 67–142, and his *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani's Kitab al-Yanabi'* (Salt Lake City, 1994), especially pp. 37–111. The critical edition of al-Sijistani's *Kitab al-yanabi'*, together with a summary French translation, may be found in H. Corbin, *Trilogie Ismaélienne* (Tehran and Paris, 1961), text pp. 1–97, translation pp. 5–127. Al-Kirmani's system, as propounded in his *Rahat al-'aql*, and its philosophical provenance, are thoroughly studied in Daniel de Smet's *La Quiétude de l'intellect: Néoplatonisme et gnose Ismaélienne dans l'oeuvre de Hamid ad-Din al-Kirmani (X^e/XI^e s.)* (Louvain, 1995). Of Nasir-i Khusraw's major theological-philosophical texts, only two have been published so far in critical editions with translations into European languages; see his *Jami' al-hikmatayn*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mu'in (Tehran and Paris, 1953); French trans., *Le Livre réunissant les deux sagesses*, tr. I. de Gastines (Paris, 1990), and *Gushayish va rahayish*, ed. S. Nafisi (Tehran, 1961); ed. and tr. F.M. Hunzai as *Knowledge and Liberation* (London, 1998).

29. The earliest Ismaili accounts of the Sulayhids, and the contemporary *da'wa* in Yaman, are contained in the *da'i* Idris 'Imad al-Din b. al-Hasan's *'Uyun al-akhbar*, vol. 7, ed. and summary English trans. by A. Fu'ad Sayyid in collaboration with P.E. Walker and M.A. Pomerantz as *The Fatimids and their Successors in Yaman: The History of an Islamic Community* (London, 2002) and his *Nuzhat al-afkar*, which is still in manuscript form. The best modern

study here is Husayn F. al-Hamdani's *al-Sulayhiyyun wa'l-haraka al-Fatimiyya fi'l-Yaman* (Cairo, 1955), especially pp. 62–231.

30. See F. Daftary, 'Sayyida Hurra: The Isma'ili Sulayhid Queen of Yemen', in Gavin R.G. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World* (New York. 1998), pp. 117–130, where additional references are cited.

31. For the early history of the Nizari *da'wa* and state, coinciding with the final eight decades of the Fatimid *dawla*, see 'Ata-Malik Juwayni, *Ta'rikh-i jahan-gusha*, ed. M. Qazwini (Leiden and London, 1912–37), vol. 3, pp. 186–239; English trans., *The History of the World-Conqueror*, tr. J.A. Boyle (Manchester, 1958), vol. 2, pp. 666–697; Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* (The Hague, 1955), pp. 41–109, 145–159; B. Lewis, *The Assassins* (London, 1967), pp. 38–75; F. Daftary, 'Hasan-i Sabbah and the Origins of the Nizari Isma'ili Movement', in Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History*, pp. 181–204, and his *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 324–391, 669–687, where full references to the sources and studies are given.

32. On the early histories of Musta'li Ismailism as well as the Hafizi and Tayyibi *da'wa*s, see S.M. Stern, 'The Succession to the Fatimid Imam al-Amir, the Claims of the later Fatimids to the Imamate, and the Rise of Tayyibi Ismailism', *Oriens*, 4 (1951), pp. 193–255; reprinted in his *History and Culture in the Medieval Muslim World* (London, 1984), article XI; A. Hamdani, 'The Tayyibi-Fatimid Community of the Yaman at the Time of the Ayyubid Conquest of Southern Arabia', *Arabian Studies*, 7 (1985), pp. 151–160, and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 256–286, 654–663.

5

Sayyida Hurra: The Ismaili Queen of Yaman

Few women rose to positions of political prominence in the medieval *dar al-Islam*, and, perhaps with the major exception of Sayyida Hurra, none can be cited for having attained leadership in the religious domain.* A host of diverse factors have accounted for a lack of active participation of women in the political and religious affairs of the Islamic world during the medieval and later times; and the associated complex issues are still being debated among scholars of different disciplines and among Muslims themselves. Be that as it may, there were occasional exceptions to this rule in the medieval *dar al-Islam*, indicating that opportunities did in principle exist for capable women to occupy positions of public prominence under special circumstances. This study briefly investigates the career and times of the foremost member of this select group, namely the queen Sayyida Hurra who, in a unique instance in the entire history of medieval Islam, combined in her person the political as well as the *de facto* religious leadership of Sulayhid Yaman; and in both these functions was closely associated with the Fatimid dynasty and the headquarters of the Ismaili *daʿwa* or mission centred at Cairo.

The Fatimids, who established their own Ismaili Shiʿi caliphate in rivalry with the Sunni Abbasids, were renowned for their tolerance towards other religious communities, permitting meritorious non-Ismaili Muslims and even non-Muslims to occupy the position of vizier and other high offices in their state. As part of their general concern with education, the Fatimids also adopted unprecedented policies for the education of women. From early on in the reign of

the founder of the dynasty, ʿAbd Allah (ʿUbayd Allah) al-Mahdi (297–322/909–934), the Fatimids organized popular instruction for women.[1] And from the time of al-Muʿizz (341–365/953–975), who transferred the seat of the Fatimid state to Egypt and founded the city of Cairo, more formal instruction was developed for women, culminating in the *majalis al-hikma* (sessions of wisdom) on Ismaili doctrines. Al-Maqrizi (d. 845/1442),[2] quoting al-Musabbihi (d. 420/1029) and other contemporary Fatimid chroniclers, has preserved valuable details on these lectures which were delivered regularly on a weekly basis under the direction of the Fatimid chief *daʿi*, the administrative head of the Fatimid Ismaili *daʿwa* organization. The entire programme was also closely scrutinized by the Fatimid caliph-imam, the spiritual head of the *daʿwa*. The sessions, organized separately for women and men, were arranged in terms of systematic courses on different subjects and according to the participants' degree of learning. Large numbers of women and men were instructed in various locations. For women, there were sessions at the mosque of al-Azhar, while the Fatimid and other noble women received their lectures in a special hall at the Fatimid palace. As reported by Ibn al-Tuwayr (d. 617/1220), special education for women evidently continued under the Fatimids until the fall of their dynasty in 567/1171.[3]

As a result of these educational policies and the generally tolerant attitudes of the Fatimids, there were many educated women in the Fatimid royal household and at least some among them who were also endowed with leadership qualities did manage to acquire political supremacy. In this regard, particular mention should be made of the astute Sitt al-Mulk, the sister of the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Hakim (386–411/996–1021), who ruled efficiently as the virtual head of the Fatimid state in the capacity of regent during the first four years of the caliphate of al-Hakim's son and successor, al-Zahir, until her death in 415/1024. There was also al-Mustansir's mother, who although not brought up in Egypt did become a powerful regent during the first decade of her son's caliphate (427–487/1036–1094); and subsequently, in 436/1044, all political power was openly seized and retained by her for a long period. It is significant to note that the ascendancy of these women to political prominence was not challenged by the Fatimid establishment or the Ismaili *daʿwa* organization; and, in time,

al-Mustansir not only acknowledged Sayyida Hurra's political leadership in Yaman but also accorded the Sulayhid queen special religious authority over the Ismaili communities of Yaman and Gujarat. It is indeed within this general Fatimid Ismaili milieu that the queen Sayyida's status and achievements can be better understood and evaluated in their historical context.

The earliest accounts of the Sulayhid dynasty, the queen Sayyida's career, and the contemporary Ismaili *daʿwa* in Yaman are contained in the historical work of Najm al-Din ʿUmara b. ʿAli al-Hakami,[4] the Yamani historian and poet who emigrated to Egypt and was executed in Cairo in 569/1174 for his involvement in a plot to restore the Fatimids to power. Ismaili historical writings on the Sulayhids and on the contemporary Ismailis of Yaman are, as expected, rather meagre. Our chief Ismaili authority here is again the Yamani Idris ʿImad al-Din (d. 872/1468), who as the nineteenth chief *daʿi* of the Tayyibi Ismaili community was well-informed about the earlier history of the Ismaili *daʿwa*. In the final, seventh volume of his comprehensive Ismaili history entitled *ʿUyun al-akhbar*, which is still in manuscript form, Idris has detailed accounts of the Sulayhids and the revitalization of the Ismaili *daʿwa* in Yaman under the queen Sayyida; here I have used a manuscript of this work from the collections of the Institute of Ismaili Studies Library.[5] In modern times, the best scholarly accounts of the Sulayhids and the queen Sayyida as well as the early history of Ismailism in Yaman have been produced by Husain F. al-Hamdani (1901–1962), one of the pioneers of modern Ismaili studies who based his work on a valuable collection of Ismaili manuscripts preserved in his family.[6]

Yaman was one of the regions where the early Ismaili *daʿwa* achieved particular success. As a result of the activities of the *daʿi*s Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman and ʿAli b. al-Fadl, the *daʿwa* was preached openly in Yaman already in 270/883; and by 293/905–06, when Ibn al-Fadl occupied Sanʿaʾ, almost all of Yaman was controlled by the Ismailis. Later, the Ismailis lost the bulk of their conquered territories to the Zaydi imams and other local dynasties of Yaman. With the death of Ibn Hawshab in 302/914 and the collapse of the Ismaili state in Yaman, the Ismaili *daʿwa* continued there in a dormant fashion for over a century. From this obscure period in the history of

Yamani Ismailism, when the Yamani *daʿwa* continued to receive much secret support from different tribes, especially the Banu Hamdan, only the names of the Yamani chief *daʿi*s have been preserved.[7]

By the time of the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Zahir (411–427/1021–1036), when Yaman was ruled by the Zaydis, the Najahids and other local dynasties, the leadership of the Yamani *daʿwa* had come to be vested in the *daʿi* Sulayman b. ʿAbd Allah al-Zawahi, who was based in the mountainous region of Haraz. Sulayman chose as his successor ʿAli b. Muhammad al-Sulayhi, the son of the *qadi* of Haraz, and an important Hamdani chief from the clan of Yam who had been the *daʿi*'s assistant. In 439/1047, the *daʿi* ʿAli b. Muhammad al-Sulayhi rose in revolt at Masar, a locality in Haraz where he had constructed fortifications, marking the foundation of the Ismaili Sulayhid dynasty. With much support from the Hamdani, Himyari and other Yamani tribes, ʿAli b. Muhammad soon started his rapid conquest of Yaman, and by 455/1063, he had subjugated all of Yaman. Recognizing the suzerainty of the Fatimid caliph-imam, ʿAli chose Sanʿa' as his capital and instituted the Fatimid Ismaili *khutba* throughout his dominions. The Sulayhids ruled over Yaman as vassals of the Fatimids for almost one century. Sulayhid rule was effectively terminated in 532/1138, on the death of the queen Sayyida, the most capable member of the dynasty.

ʿAli b. Muhammad al-Sulayhi was married to his cousin Asma bint Shihab, a remarkable woman in her own right. Noted for her independent character, Asma took an active part in the affairs of the state and also played an important role in the education of Sayyida Hurra, who was brought up under her care at the Sulayhid court. ʿAli al-Sulayhi fell victim to a tribal vendetta and was murdered by the Najahids of Zabid in 459/1067; he was succeeded by his son Ahmad al-Mukarram (d. 477/1084), who received his investiture from the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mustansir. The queen Asma assisted her son Ahmad, as she had assisted her husband, until her death in 467/1074. Thereafter, Ahmad's wife, Sayyida Hurra, became the effective ruler of Sulayhid Yaman.

The queen (*al-malika*) al-Sayyida al-Hurra ('the Noble Lady') al-Sulayhi, who evidently also carried the name Arwa, was born in 440/1048 (or less probably in 444/1052) in Haraz. As noted, her early

education was supervised by her future mother-in-law, Asma, who as a role model must have had great influence on Sayyida's character. Ahmad al-Mukarram, who proved to be an incapable ruler, married Sayyida in 458/1066. The sources unanimously report that Sayyida was not only endowed with striking beauty, but was also noted for her courage, integrity, piety and independent character as well as intelligence. In addition, she was a woman of high literary expertise. Almost immediately on Asma's death, Sayyida consolidated the reins of the Sulayhid state in her own hands and had her name mentioned in the *khutba* after that of the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mustansir. Ahmad al-Mukarram, who had been afflicted with facial paralysis resulting from war injuries, now retired completely from public life while remaining the nominal ruler of the Sulayhid state. One of Sayyida's first acts was to transfer the seat of the Sulayhid state from San'a' to Dhu Jibla. She built a new palace there and transformed the old palace into a great mosque where she was eventually buried.

In the meantime, the foundation of the Sulayhid dynasty had marked the initiation of a new, open phase in the activities of the Ismaili *da'wa* in Yaman; and the reinvigoration of the Yamani *da'wa* continued unabated in Sayyida's time under the close supervision of the Fatimid *da'wa* headquarters in Cairo. The founder of the Sulayhid dynasty, 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Sulayhi, had been the head of the state (*dawla*) as well as the *da'wa*; he was at once the *malik* or sultan and the chief *da'i* of Yaman. Subsequently, this arrangement went through several phases, leading to an entirely independent status for the head of the *da'wa*.[8] In 454/1062, 'Ali sent Lamak b. Malik al-Hammadi, then chief *qadi* of Yaman, on a diplomatic mission to Cairo to prepare for his own visit there. For unknown reasons, however, 'Ali's visit to the Fatimid headquarters never materialized, and the *qadi* Lamak remained in Egypt for almost five years, staying with the Fatimid *da'i al-du'at*, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi (d. 470/1078), at the Dar al-'Ilm, which then also served as the administrative headquarters of the Fatimid *da'wa*. Al-Mu'ayyad instructed Lamak in Ismaili doctrines, as he had Nasir-i Khusraw, the renowned Ismaili *da'i* and philosopher of Badakhshan, about a decade earlier. Lamak returned to Yaman with a valuable collection of Ismaili texts soon after 'Ali al-Sulayhi's murder in 459/1067, having now been appointed as the chief *da'i* of Yaman.

Lamak, designated as *daʿi al-balagh*, henceforth acted as the executive head of the Yamani *daʿwa*, while Ahmad al-Mukarram succeeded his father merely as the head of state. The exceptionally close ties between the Sulayhids and the Fatimids are well attested to by numerous letters and epistles (*sijillat*) sent from the Fatimid chancery to the Sulayhids ʿAli, Ahmad, and Sayyida, mostly on the orders of al-Mustansir.[9]

It is a testimony to Sayyida Hurra's capabilities that, from the time of her assumption of effective political authority, she also came to play an increasingly important role in the affairs of the Yamani *daʿwa*, which culminated in her appointment as the *hujja* of Yaman by the Fatimid al-Mustansir shortly after the death of her husband in 477/1084. It is to be noted that in the Fatimid *daʿwa* hierarchy, this rank was higher than that of the *daʿi al-balagh* accorded to Lamak.[10] In other words, Sayyida now held the highest rank in the Yamani *daʿwa*. More significantly, this represented the first application of the rank of *hujja*, or indeed any high rank in the Ismaili hierarchy, to a woman; a truly unique event in the history of Ismailism.

In the Fatimid *daʿwa* organization, the non-Fatimid regions of the world were divided into twelve *jazira*s, or islands; each *jazira*, representing a separate and independent region for the propagation of the *daʿwa*, was placed under the jurisdiction of a high ranking *daʿi* designated as *hujja*. Yaman does not appear among the known Fatimid lists of these *jazira*s.[11] However, it seems that the term *hujja* was also used in a more limited sense in reference to the highest Ismaili dignitary of some particular regions; and it was in this sense that Sayyida was designated as the *hujja* of Yaman, much in the same way that her contemporary Fatimid *daʿi* of the eastern Iranian lands, Nasir-i Khusraw, was known as the *hujja* of Khurasan. At any event, the *hujja* was the highest representative of the *daʿwa* in any particular region. In addition to the testimony of the *daʿi* Idris, the Fatimid al-Mustansir's designation of Sayyida as the *hujja* of Yaman is corroborated by the contemporary Yamani Ismaili author al-Khattab b. al-Hasan (d. 533/1138), who uses various arguments in support of this appointment and insists that even a woman could hold that rank.[12]

The queen Sayyida was also officially put in charge of the affairs of the Ismaili *daʿwa* in western India by the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mustansir.[13] The Sulayhids had evidently with the approval of the

Fatimid *daʿwa* headquarters supervised the selection and despatch of *daʿi*s to Gujarat in western India. Sayyida now played a particularly crucial role in the Fatimids' renewed efforts in al-Mustansir's time to spread Ismailism on the Indian subcontinent. As a result of these Sulayhid efforts, a new Ismaili community was founded in Gujarat by the *daʿi*s sent from Yaman starting around 460/1067–68. The *daʿwa* in western India maintained its close ties with Yaman in the time of the queen Sayyida; and the Ismaili community founded there in the second half of the 5th/11th century evolved into the modern Tayyibi Bohra community. It should be added in passing that the extension of the Ismaili *daʿwa* in Yaman and Gujarat in al-Mustansir's time may have been directly related to the development of new Fatimid commercial interests which necessitated the utilization of Yaman as a safe base along the Red Sea trade route to India.

It was also in Sayyida's time that the Nizari-Mustaʿli schism of 487/1094 occurred in Ismailism. This schism, revolving around al-Mustansir's succession, split the then unified Ismaili community into two rival factions, the Mustaʿliyya, who recognized al-Mustaʿli as al-Mustansir's successor on the Fatimid throne, also as their imam; and the Nizariyya, who upheld the rights of al-Mustansir's eldest son and original heir-designate, Nizar, who had been set aside by force through the machinations of the all-powerful Fatimid vizier al-Afdal, whose sister was also married to al-Mustaʿli. After the failure of his brief revolt, Nizar himself was captured and murdered in Cairo in 488/1095.

Due to the close administrative ties between the Sulayhid state and Fatimid Egypt, the queen Sayyida recognized al-Mustaʿli as the legitimate imam after al-Mustansir. She, thus, retained her ties with Cairo and the *daʿwa* headquarters there, which now served as the centre of the Mustaʿlian *daʿwa*. As a result of Sayyida's decision, the Ismaili communities of Yaman and Gujarat along with the bulk of the Ismailis of Egypt and Syria joined the Mustaʿlian camp without any dissent. By contrast, the Ismailis of the eastern lands, situated in the Saljuq dominions, who were then under the leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 518/1124), championed the cause of Nizar and refused to recognize the Fatimid caliph al-Mustaʿli's imamate. Hasan-i Sabbah, who had already been following an independent revolutionary policy

from his mountain headquarters at Alamut in northern Persia, completely severed his relations with Cairo; he had now in fact founded the independent Nizari *daʿwa*, similarly to what the queen Sayyida was to do for the Mustaʿli-Tayyibi *daʿwa* a few decades later.

The queen Sayyida remained close to the Fatimid al-Mustaʿli (487–495/1094–1101) and his successor al-Amir (495–524/1101–1130), who addressed her with several honorific titles.[14] Until his death in 515/1121, the vizier and commander of the armies, al-Afdal, was however the effective ruler of Fatimid Egypt, also supervising the affairs of the Mustaʿlian *daʿwa*. During this period, the Fatimid state had embarked on its rapid decline, which was accentuated by encounters with the Crusaders. Egypt was in fact invaded temporarily in 511/1117 by Baldwin I, king of the Latin state of Jerusalem. In Yaman, too, the Sulayhid state had come under pressures from the Zaydis and others, while several influential Yamani tribal chiefs had challenged without much immediate success Sayyida's authority. In particular, the *qadi* ʿImran, who had earlier supported the Sulayhids, attempted to rally the various Hamdani clans against her. In addition to resenting the authority of a female ruler, he also had his differences with the *daʿi* Lamak. As a result of these challenges, the Sulayhids eventually lost Sanʿaʾ to a new Hamdanid dynasty supported by the family of the *qadi* ʿImran. Meanwhile, Sayyida had continued to look after the affairs of the Yamani *daʿwa* with the collaboration of its executive head, Lamak; and on Lamak's death in 491/1098, his son Yahya took administrative charge of the *daʿwa* until his own death in 520/1126.

There are indications suggesting that during the final years of al-Afdal's vizierate, relations deteriorated between the Sulayhid queen and the Fatimid court. It was perhaps due to this fact that in 513/1119 Ibn Najib al-Dawla was despatched from Cairo to Yaman to bring the Sulayhid state under greater control of the Fatimids. However, Ibn Najib al-Dawla and his Armenian soldiers made themselves very unpopular in Yaman, and the queen attempted to get rid of him. In 519/1125, Ibn Najib al-Dawla, whose Yamani mission had been reconfirmed by al-Afdal's successor, al-Maʾmun, was recalled to Cairo, but drowned on the return journey. By the final years of al-Amir's rule, the queen Sayyida had developed a deep distrust of the Fatimids and was prepared to assert her independence from the Fatimid establishment.

The opportunity for this decision came with the death of al-Amir and the Hafizi-Tayyibi schism in Mustaʿlian Ismailism. Meanwhile, on the death of the *daʿi* Yahya b. Lamak al-Hammadi in 520/1126, his assistant *daʿi*, al-Dhuʾayb b. Musa al-Wadiʿi al-Hamdani, became the executive head of the Yamani *daʿwa*. This appointment had received the prior approval of both the queen Sayyida and the *daʿi* Yahya.

Al-Amir, the tenth Fatimid caliph and the twentieth imam of the Mustaʿlian Ismailis, was assassinated in Dhu'l-Qaʿda 524/October 1130. Henceforth, the Fatimid caliphate embarked on its final phase of decline and collapse, marked by numerous dynastic, religious, political and military crises, while a new schism further weakened the Mustaʿlian *daʿwa*. According to the Mustaʿli-Tayyibi tradition, a son named al-Tayyib had been born to al-Amir a few months before his death. This is supported by an epistle of al-Amir sent by a certain Sharif Muhammad b. Haydara to the Sulayhid queen of Yaman, announcing the birth of Abu'l-Qasim al-Tayyib in RabiʿII 524 AH.[15] The historical reality of al-Tayyib is also attested to by Ibn Muyassar (d. 677/1278),[16] and other historians. At any rate, al-Tayyib was immediately designated as al-Amir's heir. On al-Amir's death, however, power was assumed by his cousin, Abu'l-Maymun ʿAbd al-Majid, who was later in 526/1132 proclaimed caliph and imam with the title al-Hafiz li-Din Allah.

The proclamation of al-Hafiz as caliph and imam caused a major schism in the Mustaʿlian community. In particular, his claim to the imamate, even though he was not a direct descendant of the previous Mustaʿlian imam, received the support of the official *daʿwa* organization in Cairo and the majority of the Mustaʿlian Ismailis of Egypt and Syria, who became known as the Hafiziyya. The situation was quite different in Yaman. There, a bitter contest rooted in power politics ensued within the Mustaʿlian community. As a result, the Yamani Ismailis, who had always been closely connected with the *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo, split into two factions. The Sulayhid queen, who had already become disillusioned with Cairo, readily championed the cause of al-Tayyib, recognizing him as al-Amir's successor to the imamate. These Ismailis were initially known as the Amiriyya, but subsequently, after the establishment of the independent Tayyibi *daʿwa* in Yaman, they became designated as the Tayyibiyya. Sayyida

now became the official leader of the Tayyibi faction in Yaman, severing her ties with Cairo. Sayyida's decision was fully endorsed by the *daʿi* al-Dhuʾayb, the administrative head of the Yamani *daʿwa*. By contrast, the Zurayʿids of ʿAdan and some of the Hamdanids of Sanʿaʾ, who had won their independence from the Sulayhids, now supported Hafizi Ismailism, recognizing al-Hafiz and later Fatimid caliphs as their imams. Hafizi Ismailism, tied to the Fatimid regime, disappeared soon after the collapse of the Fatimid dynasty in 567/1171 and the Ayyubid invasion of southern Arabia in 569/1173. But the Tayyibi *daʿwa*, initiated by Sayyida, survived in Yaman with its headquarters remaining in Haraz. Due to the close ties between Sulayhid Yaman and Gujarat, the Tayyibi cause was also upheld in western India, which was eventually to account for the bulk of the Tayyibi Ismailis, known there as Bohras.

Nothing is known about the fate of al-Tayyib, who seems to have been murdered in his infancy on al-Hafiz's order. It is, however, the belief of the Tayyibis that al-Tayyib survived and went into concealment; and that the imamate subsequently continued secretly in his progeny, being handed down from father to son, during the current period of *satr* (concealment) initiated by al-Tayyib's own concealment. The news of al-Tayyib's birth was a source of rejoicing at the Sulayhid court. For this event, we also have the eyewitness report of al-Khattab, who was then assistant to the *daʿi* al-Dhuʾayb.[17] From that time until her death, the aged Sulayhid queen made every effort to consolidate the Yamani *daʿwa* on behalf of al-Tayyib; and al-Dhuʾayb and other leaders of the *daʿwa* in Sulayhid Yaman, henceforth called *al-daʿwa al-Tayyibiyya*, collaborated closely with Sayyida. It was soon after 526/1132 that Sayyida declared al-Dhuʾayb as *al-daʿi al-mutlaq*, or *daʿi* with absolute authority. Having earlier broken her relations with Fatimid Egypt, by this measure she also made the Tayyibi *daʿwa* independent of the Sulayhid state, a wise measure that was to ensure the survival of Tayyibi Ismailism after the downfall of the Sulayhid state. The *daʿi mutlaq* was now in fact empowered to conduct the *daʿwa* activities on behalf of the hidden Tayyibi imam. This marked the foundation of the independent Tayyibi *daʿwa* in Yaman under the leadership of a *daʿi mutlaq*, a title retained by al-Dhuʾayb's successors.[18] The *daʿi* al-Dhuʾayb thus became the first of the absolute

*daʿi*s, who have followed one another during the current period of *satr* in the history of Tayyibi Ismailism.

As noted, al-Dhuʾayb was initially assisted by al-Khattab b. al-Hasan, who belonged to a family of the chiefs of al-Hajur, another Hamdani clan. An important Ismaili author and Yamani poet, al-Khattab himself was the Hajuri sultan who fought as a brave warrior on behalf of the Sulayhid queen. His loyalty to Sayyida Hurra and his military services to the Ismaili cause contributed significantly to the success of the early Tayyibi *daʿwa* in difficult times. Al-Khattab was killed in 533/1138, six months after the queen had died. On al-Khattab's death, al-Dhuʾayb designated Ibrahim b. al-Husayn al-Hamidi, belonging to the Hamidi clan of the Banu Hamdan, as his new assistant; and on al-Dhuʾayb death in 546/1151, Ibrahim (d. 557/1162) succeeded to the headship of the Tayyibi *daʿwa* as the second *daʿi mutlaq*. Al-Dhuʾayb, al-Khattab and Ibrahim were in fact the earliest leaders of the Tayyibi *daʿwa* who, under the initial supreme guidance and patronage of Sayyida, consolidated this branch of Ismailism in Yaman. The Tayyibi *daʿwa* had now become completely independent of both the Fatimid regime and the Sulayhid state, and this explains why it survived the fall of both dynasties and managed in subsequent centuries, without any political support, to spread successfully in Yaman and western India. That the minoritarian Mustaʿli-Tayyibi community of the Ismailis exists at all today is indeed mainly due to the foresight and leadership of Sayyida Hurra, much in the same way that the survival of the majoritarian Ismaili community of the Nizaris may be attributed in no small measure to the success of Hasan-i Sabbah in founding the independent Nizari *daʿwa*, while in both instances the contemporary imams themselves had remained inaccessible to their followers.

The Malika Sayyida Hurra bint Ahmad al-Sulayhi died in 532/1138, after a long and eventful rule. Her death marked the effective end of the Sulayhid dynasty, which held on to some scattered fortresses in Yaman for a few decades longer. A most capable ruler, Sayyida occupies a unique place in the annals of Ismailism, not only because she was the sole woman to occupy the highest ranks of the Ismaili *daʿwa* hierarchy and to lead the Yamani *daʿwa* in turbulent times, but more significantly because she in effect was largely responsible for the

founding of the independent Mustaʿli-Tayyibi *daʿwa*, which still has followers in Yaman, India, Pakistan, and elsewhere. It should also be noted here that the Tayyibi Ismailis have been responsible for preserving a large portion of the Ismaili texts produced during the Fatimid period, and the preservation of this Ismaili literature too may be attributed largely to Sayyida's foresight. The queen Sayyida's devotion to Ismailism and the cause of al-Tayyib found its final expression in her will in which she bequeathed her renowned collection of jewellery to Imam al-Tayyib.[19]

This remarkable Ismaili Sulayhid woman of the medieval Islamic world was buried in the mosque of Dhu Jibla that she had founded herself. And throughout the centuries, Sayyida's grave has served as a place of pilgrimage for Muslims of diverse communities; the pilgrims not always being aware of her Ismaili Shiʿi connection. Various attempts were made in medieval times by Zaydis and other enemies of the Ismailis in Yaman to destroy the mosque of Dhu Jibla; but Sayyida Hurra's tomb chamber, inscribed with Qur'anic verses, remained intact until it, too, was damaged in September 1993 by members of a local Sunni group who considered the established practice of visiting shrines to be heretical.[20]

Notes

* This chapter was originally published as 'Sayyida Hurra: The Ismaʿili Sulayhid Queen of Yemen', in Gavin R.G. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety* (New York, 1998), pp. 117–130.

1. See Idris ʿImad al-Din b. al-Hasan, *ʿUyun al-akhbar wa-funun al-athar*, ed. M. Ghalib (Beirut, 1973–78), vol. 5, pp. 137–138; also in S.M. Stern, *Studies in Early Ismaʿilism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983), pp. 102–103.

2. Taqi al-Din Ahmad b. ʿAli al-Maqrizi, *Kitab al-mawaʿiz wa'l-iʿtibar fi dhikr al-khitat wa'l-athar* (Bulaq, 1270/1853–54), vol. 1, pp. 390– 391, and vol. 2, pp. 341–342. See also H. Halm, 'The Ismaʿili Oath of Allegiance (*ʿahd*) and the "Sessions of Wisdom" (*majalis al-hikma*) in Fatimid Times', in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Ismaʿili History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), especially pp. 98–112, and H. Halm, *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning* (London, 1997), pp. 41–56.

3. See Ibn al-Tuwayr, *Nuzhat al-muqlatayn fi akhbar al-dawlatayn*, ed.

A. Fu'ad Sayyid (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 110–112, and S.M. Stern 'Cairo as the Centre of the Isma'ili Movement', in *Colloque international sur l'histoire du Caire* (Cairo, 1972), p. 441; reprinted in Stern, *Studies*, pp. 242–243.

4. 'Umara b. 'Ali al-Hakami, *Ta'rikh al-Yaman*, ed. and tr. Henry C. Kay, in his *Yaman, its Early Mediaeval History* (London, 1892), text pp. 1–102, translation pp. 1–137; more recently, this history has been edited by Hasan S. Mahmud (Cairo, 1957).

5. See Idris 'Imad al-Din, *'Uyun al-akhbar*, vol. 7, Arabic manuscript 230, The Institute of Ismaili Studies Library, London, containing the history of the Sulayhids on fols. 1–222, with fols. 117v–222v devoted to Sayyida Hurra. See A. Gacek, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 136–140. An edition of the *'Uyun*'s seventh volume, together with summary English translation, has now been undertaken by A. Fu'ad Sayyid, in collaboration with P.E. Walker and M.A. Pomerantz, under the title of *The Fatimids and their Successors in Yaman* (London, 2002).

6. In this study I have drawn on the following works by H.F. al Hamdani: 'The Doctrines and History of the Isma'ili *Da'wat* in Yemen' (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1931), especially pp. 27–47; 'The Life and Times of Queen Saiyidah Arwa the Sulaihid of the Yemen', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 18 (1931), pp. 505–517, and *al-Sulayhiyyun wa'l-haraka al-Fatimiyya fi'l-Yaman* (Cairo, 1955), especially pp. 141–211, which is still the best modern study on the subject. Some recent publications on Sayyida Hurra, including Leila S. al-Imad's 'Women and Religion in the Fatimid Caliphate: The Case of al-Sayyidah al-Hurrah, Queen of Yemen', in M.M. Mazzaoui and V.B. Moreen, ed., *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson* (Salt Lake City, 1990), pp. 137–144, and Fatima Mernissi's *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, tr. M.J. Lakeland (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 139–158, provide new perspectives without adding significant details to al-Hamdani's studies. See also F. Krenkow, 'Sulaihi', *EI*, vol. 4, pp. 515–517; G.R. Smith, 'Sulayhids', *EI2*, vol. 9, pp. 815–817; M. Ghalib, *A'lam al-Isma'iliyya* (Beirut, 1964), pp. 143–153; Khayr al-Din al-Zarkali, *al-A'lam* (3rd ed., Beirut, 1969), vol. 1, p. 279, and 'Umar R. Kabbala, *A'lam al-nisa'* (3rd ed., Beirut, 1977), vol. 1, pp. 253–254.

7. See Idris, *'Uyun al-akhbar*, vol. 5, pp. 31–44; Ibn Malik al-Yamani, *Kashf asrar al-Batiniyya wa-akhbar al-Qaramita*, ed. M.Z. al-Kawthari (Cairo, 1939), pp. 39–42, written by a Yamani Sunni jurist who lived at the time of the founder of the Sulayhid dynasty; he later became an Ismaili but then abjured and produced this anti-Ismaili treatise which is also reproduced in S. Zakkar, ed., *Akhbar al-Qaramita* (2nd ed., Damascus, 1982), pp. 243–248. Ibn Malik's

work evidently served as the primary source on the early Ismaili *daʿwa* in Yaman for all subsequent Sunni historians of Yaman, including Baha' al-Din al-Janadi (d. 732/1332), who reproduces Ibn Malik's list of the Yamani *daʿis* in his *Akhbar al-Qaramita bi'l-Yaman*, ed. and tr. Kay, in his *Yaman*, text pp. 150–52, translation pp. 208–212. See also al-Hamdani, *al-Sulayhiyyun*, pp. 49–61.

8. A. Hamdani, 'The Daʿi Hatim Ibn Ibrahim al-Hamidi (d. 596 H/1199 AD) and his Book *Tuhfat al-Qulub*', *Oriens* 23–24 (1970–71), especially pp. 270–279.

9. See Abu Tamim Maʿadd al-Mustansir bi'llah, *al-Sijillat al-Mustansiriyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Munʿim Majid (Cairo, 1954), and H.F. al-Hamdani, 'The Letters of al-Mustansir Bi'llah', *BSO(A)S,* 7 (1934), pp. 307–324, describing the contents of the letters.

10. F. Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 227ff.

11. See al-Qadi al-Nuʿman b. Muhammad, *Ta'wil al-daʿa'im*, ed. M. H. al-Aʿzami (Cairo, 1967–72), vol. 2, p. 74; vol. 3, pp. 48–49; Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani, *Ithbat al-nubuwwat*, ed. ʿArif Tamir (Beirut, 1966), p. 172; Ibn Hawqal, *Kitab surat al-ard*, ed. J. H. Kramers (2nd ed., Leiden, 1938–39), p. 310, and Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis*, pp. 228–229.

12. Al-Khattab b. al-Hasan, *Ghayat al-mawalid*, Arabic manuscript 249, The Institute of Ismaili Studies Library, London, fols. 4r-8r; see Gacek, *Catalogue*, vol. 1, p. 21. See also I.K. Poonawala, *al-Sultan al-Khattab* (Cairo, 1967), pp. 78–80, and S.M. Stern, 'The Succession to the Fatimid Imam al-Amir, the Claims of the later Fatimids to the Imamate, and the Rise of Tayyibi Ismailism', *Oriens*, 4 (1951), pp. 221, 227–228; reprinted in S.M. Stern, *History and Culture in the Medieval Muslim World* (London, 1984), article XI.

13. Al-Mustansir, *al-Sijillat*, pp. 167–169, 203–206, and al-Hamdani, 'Letters', pp. 321–324.

14. See al-Maqrizi, *Ittiʿaz al-hunafa'*, ed. J. al-Shayyal and M.H.M. Ahmad (Cairo, 1967–73), vol. 3, p. 103.

15. This *sijill* is preserved in the seventh volume of the *ʿUyun al-akhbar* of the *daʿi* Idris, ed. Sayyid, pp. 247–249, and in other Tayyibi sources; it is also quoted in ʿUmara, *Ta'rikh*, text pp. 100–102, translation pp. 135–136. See also Stern, 'Succession', pp. 194ff., and al-Hamdani, *al-Sulayhiyyun*, pp. 183–184, 321–322.

16. Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbar Misr*, ed. A. Fu'ad Sayyid (Cairo, 1981), pp. 109–110.

17. The relevant passage from al-Khattab's *Ghayat al-mawalid* is also contained in W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*

(London, etc., 1942), pp. 37–38; English translation in Stern, 'Succession', pp. 223–224.

18. The earliest history of the Tayyibi *daʿwa* in Yaman is related by the *daʿi* Hatim b. Ibrahim in his unpublished *Tuhfat al-qulub*. The *daʿi* Idris has biographical accounts of al-Dhu'ayb and his successors in his *ʿUyun al-akhbar*, vol. 7, and *Nuzhat al-afkar*. See also Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis*, pp. 285ff.

19. Sayyida's testament, containing a detailed description of her collection of jewels, has been preserved by Idris in his *ʿUyun al-akhbar*, vol. 7, ed. Sayyid, pp. 279–290, reproduced in al-Hamdani, *al-Sulayhiyyun*, pp. 323–330.

20. I owe this information to Tim Mackintosh-Smith, a long-time resident of Yaman.

Part II

The Nizari Phase

6

Historiography of the Early Nizari Ismailis in Persia

At various times in the course of their mediaeval history, especially during the so-called classical Fatimid period (297–487/909–1094) when Ismaili thought and literature attained their summit,* the renowned Ismaili *daʿi*s or missionaries who were assigned to particular regions for propagating the Ismaili doctrines and winning new worthy converts, produced numerous treatises on theology, philosophy, jurisprudence and many other subjects.[1] But from early on, the learned Ismaili *daʿi*-authors who were normally trained as religious scholars, were rarely interested in historical writing. Al-Qadi al-Nuʿman (d.363/974), the organizer of the Ismaili system of *fiqh* or jurisprudence and the most prolific author of the Fatimid period, produced only one historical work, the *Iftitah al-daʿwa*. This earliest historical work in the Ismaili literature, completed in 346/957, covers merely the immediate background to the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate.[2] Furthermore, only one general history of Ismailism seems to have been written by an Ismaili author of the medieval times, namely, Idris ʿImad al-Din (d. 872/1468) who was the nineteenth Mustaʿli-Tayyibi chief *daʿi* in Yaman.[3]

The general scarcity of Ismaili historiography has, in no small measure, been due also to the hostile conditions under which the community lived until more recent times. Ever since the opening phase of their history, when they were also conducting a revolutionary campaign for uprooting the Abbasids, the Ismailis as Shiʿis have been persecuted by numerous major dynasties as well as many local rulers in the Muslim world, in addition to being depicted as *malahida*

or heretics by many other Muslim groups. Under such circumstances, the Ismailis were often obliged to live clandestinely, also adhering to the Shiʿi principle of *taqiyya*, precautionary dissimulation of one's true religious beliefs in the face of danger. As a result, Ismailism generally developed under utmost secrecy, and the Ismaili authors were reluctant to compile annalistic or other types of historical accounts. Under the circumstances, the Ismailis were not prepared to divulge any details about their movement which, if fallen into the hands of their enemies, might endanger the survival of their co-religionists in particular localities or jeopardise the activities of their *daʿi*s. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Ismailis, like similarly-situated religious communities, have generally lacked a tradition of historiography. In fact, from early on in the 3rd/9th century, the Ismailis developed their own metahistorical notions and came to hold a particular conception of history, which may more appropriately be called hierohistory, representing an *a priori* sacral image of the past and a cyclical view of time and the religious history of mankind. According to this cyclical prophetic conception, which was retained with various modifications as an integral component of the Ismaili gnosis until late medieval times, the hierohistory of mankind proceeded through seven prophetic eras of different durations, each era or cycle (*dawr*) inaugurated by a law-announcing, speaker-prophet or *natiq*, enunciating a revealed message which in its exoteric aspect contained a religious law (*sharīʿa*).[4]

There were, however, two exceptional periods in the Ismaili movement when the Ismailis did particularly concern themselves with history in its traditional sense, and with historical writing; and they produced or commissioned works which may be regarded as official chronicles. It was only during those two periods, marking temporary traditions of Ismaili historiography, that the Ismailis possessed states of their own, viz., the Fatimid caliphate and the Nizari Ismaili state centred at Alamut in Persia. There were major differences between the two Ismaili states in question. The Fatimid state, ruled by the Ismaili imam, represented a vast empire with an elaborate administrative and ceremonial apparatus, which rivalled the Abbasid caliphate; while the Nizari state, ruled initially by *daʿi*s and later by the Nizari imams themselves, was a unique principality

in the Muslim world, comprised of a host of mountain strongholds and their surrounding villages as well as a few towns in scattered territories stretching from eastern Persia to Syria. Nevertheless, in both instances, the Ismaili *da'wa* had brought about a *dawla*, and the Ismailis had now come to possess their own dynasties of rulers and political events, which needed to be recorded by trustworthy chroniclers who, unlike the majority of the medieval Muslim theologians, heresiographers, polemicists and historians, were not hostile towards the Ismailis and their cause. As a result, a host of authors, often belonging to the Ismaili community, produced such histories of the Fatimid and Nizari states. Indeed, numerous official Fatimid chronicles, representing histories of the Fatimid dynasty and state and to some extent also of the Ismaili movement in Fatimid dominions, were compiled by contemporary Ismaili and non-Ismaili authors like al-Musabbihi (d. 420/1029). These Fatimid chronicles, compiled at different times, especially after the transference of the seat of the Fatimid caliphate from Ifriqiya to Egypt in 362/973, did not survive the downfall of the Fatimid dynasty in 567/1171, when Egypt rapidly returned to the fold of Sunni Islam during the ensuing Ayyubid period. The Ayyubids systematically destroyed the renowned Fatimid libraries at Cairo and elsewhere in Egypt and severely persecuted the Ismailis there. Under similar tragic circumstances, the Ismaili literature, including the official chronicles, produced by the early Persian Nizari Ismailis, too, perished almost completely during the Mongol invasions, though some of this literature remained extant for some time after the collapse of the Nizari Ismaili state in Persia in 654/1256. It is the purpose of this article to investigate the nature of the Persian historical writings on the Nizari Ismailis of Persia and their state during the Alamut period (483–654/1090–1256), produced by contemporary Nizari authors, and a group of near-contemporary non-Ismaili Muslim historians who, in fact, are our most important sources on the subject.

On the death of al-Mustansir bi'llah in 487/1094, a major schism occurred in the Ismaili movement concerning the succession to the imamate. Al-Mustansir, the eighth Fatimid caliph and the eighteenth Ismaili imam, had already designated his eldest son Abu Mansur Nizar as his successor by the rule of the *nass*. However, al-Afdal, who

a few months earlier had succeeded his own father Badr al-Jamali as the all-powerful vizier of the Fatimid state, had other plans. Aiming to retain the state reins in his own hands, al-Afdal moved quickly and placed Nizar's much younger brother Ahmad on the Fatimid throne with the title of al-Mustaʿli bi'llah. Al-Afdal immediately obtained for al-Mustaʿli the allegiance of the notables of the Fatimid state and the leaders of the Ismaili *daʿwa* at Cairo. Refusing to pay homage to al-Mustaʿli, the dispossessed Nizar fled to Alexandria, where he briefly led a revolt with the help of the local inhabitants. By the end of 488/1095, however, al-Afdal had effectively subdued this revolt and Nizar had been executed. These events caused the permanent Nizari-Mustaʿli split in Ismailism. Al-Mustaʿli was acknowledged as his father's successor by the Egyptian Ismailis, many Syrian Ismailis, and by the whole Ismaili community in Yaman and that in western India dependent on it. These Ismailis, who were under the direct influence of the Fatimid regime, now accepted al-Mustaʿli as their nineteenth imam and henceforth became known as the Mustaʿliyya or Mustaʿlawiyya. By contrast, the Ismailis of the Saljuq dominions, notably those of Persia and Iraq and a faction of Syrian Ismailis, refused to recognise the ninth Fatimid caliph al-Mustaʿli as their next imam. These eastern Ismailis, upholding al-Mustansir's original *nass*, acknowledged Nizar as their nineteenth imam and became known as the Nizariyya.

A few years earlier, in 483/1090, the seizure of the mountain fortress of Alamut in northern Persia by Hasan-i Sabbah had in fact marked the foundation of what was to become the Nizari Ismaili state of Persia and Syria. At the same time, the Ismailis of Persia had started an armed revolt against the alien rule of the Saljuq Turks. The architect of the Nizari state and revolt as well as the founder of the independent Nizari *daʿwa* was, indeed, the redoubtable Hasan-i Sabbah, who eventually became the supreme Nizari leader within the Saljuq sultanate, while the Nizari imams succeeding Nizar remained inaccessible to their followers for several decades. The Persian Nizaris soon came to possess a network of fortresses in three separate territories, notably, Rudbar, situated in the medieval Caspian region of Daylam; Qumis, with its main fortress of Girdkuh; and Quhistan, in south-eastern Khurasan, where the Nizaris also controlled several

towns. By the opening years of the 6th/12th century, the Persian Nizaris had already extended their activities to Syria. A continuous chain of *daʿi*s, despatched from Alamut, organized and led the Nizari *daʿwa* and community in Syria. The Syrian Nizaris, who came to possess their own network of fortresses, remained a subsidiary of the Persian Nizari state.[5]

The Nizari Ismaili state, whose territories were separated from one another by long distances, maintained a remarkable cohesion and sense of unity both internally and against the outside world. This state had its supreme central ruler, who normally resided at Alamut and acted as an independent territorial amir, as well as its own mint.[6] The rulers of the Nizari state, also acting as the central leaders of the Nizari *daʿwa* and community, were Hasan-i Sabbah and seven others, who are commonly referred to as the lords (Persian singular, *khudavand*) of Alamut. During the earliest phase in the history of Nizari Ismailism, known as the *dawr al-satr* or period of concealment (488–557/1095–1162), when the Nizari imams remained hidden, Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 518/1124) and his next two successors led the Nizaris as *daʿi*s and *hujja*s, or full representatives, of the absent imam. Starting with Hasan II *ʿala dhikrihiʾl-salam* (557–561/1162–1166), the fourth lord of Alamut, however, the Nizari imamate became manifest and the imams themselves now took personal charge of the affairs of the Nizari *daʿwa,* state and community, handing down the leadership on a hereditary basis.

The Persian Nizaris of the Alamut period experienced many vicissitudes in the course of their history of some 166 years. They withstood numerous massacres and military campaigns directed against them by the Saljuqs and other adversaries. They also participated in many local alliances and conflicts in Syria, the Caspian region and eastern Persia. For a brief period in the reign of Jalal al-Din Hasan III (607–618/1210–1221), the sixth lord of Alamut, the Nizaris even observed the *shariʿa* in its Sunni form and successfully achieved a rapprochement with the Sunni world. As a result, the perennial hostilities between the Nizaris and the larger Muslim community were now set aside, and the Nizaris came to play an active part in the important alliances of the Abbasid caliph al-Nasir. The Nizari state in Persia finally collapsed in 654/1256 under the onslaught of the

all-conquering Mongols; and the eighth and last lord of Alamut, Rukn al-Din Khurshah, was killed in Mongol captivity in the following year somewhere in Mongolia. The Syrian Nizaris, who had escaped the tragic fate of their Persian co-religionists, were completely subdued by 671/1273 at the hands of the Mamluk sultan Baybars I. Nizari Ismailism was from the very beginning also associated with certain doctrinal developments, subsequently designated by the outsiders as the new preaching (*al-daʿwa al-jadida*), in contradistinction to the old preaching (*al-daʿwa al-qadima*) of Fatimid Ismailism, the common doctrinal heritage of both the Nizariyya and the Mustaʿliyya.

Being preoccupied with their survival in an extremely hostile milieu, the Persian Nizaris did not produce any substantial volume of literature during the Alamut period. Indeed, the Nizari community did not produce outstanding theologians comparable to the learned *daʿi*-authors of the Fatimid period and the later *daʿi mutlaq*s of the Mustaʿli-Tayyibi community in Yaman. By contrast, the Persian Nizari community, which was often involved in long-drawn military entanglements, produced capable military personalities who also acted as commandants of the major strongholds and conducted limited *daʿwa* activities as *daʿi*s. Be that as it may, the meagre literary output of the Persian Nizaris was written in the Persian language, which was adopted by the Nizaris from the beginning of the Alamut period as their religious language, an unprecedented event in Persia since the Arab conquests. Under these circumstances, the Persian Nizaris did not generally develop any particular interest in copying the classical Ismaili works of the Fatimid times, which in due course came to be preserved mainly by the Mustaʿli Ismailis. On the other hand, the Syrian Nizaris, who produced their own literature in Arabic, preserved some of the Fatimid Ismaili treatises. However, the Syrian Nizari works were not translated into Persian in Persia, and similarly, the Persian Nizari works of the Alamut period were not translated into Arabic and thus remained inaccessible to the Syrian Nizari community.

The Nizari Ismailis of the Alamut period did, nonetheless, engage in a certain amount of intellectual and literary activity. Hasan-i Sabbah, who was a learned theologian himself, founded a library at the castle of Alamut, which in time became quite renowned for its Ismaili

and non-Ismaili collections of religious manuscripts as well as its scientific tracts and instruments. Other Persian Nizari strongholds, too, especially in Quhistan, seem to have been equipped with libraries. The Persian Nizaris of the later Alamut period also played an active part in the intellectual life of the time, acting as hosts to many outside scholars and theologians who now availed themselves of the Nizari libraries and patronage of learning. Amongst such Muslim scholars who lived and worked for extended periods in the Nizari strongholds of Quhistan and Rudbar, especially in the aftermath of the earliest Mongol invasions, the most eminent was Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (597–672/1201–1274), a leading Muslim philosopher and scientist of his time. Around the year 624/1227, al-Tusi entered the service of Nasir al-Din ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Abi Mansur (d. 655/1257), the learned *muhtasham* or local head of the Quhistani Nizaris. During his long stay of some three decades amongst the Nizaris, initially at different locations in Quhistan and finally at Alamut, al-Tusi wrote numerous treatises, including several Ismaili works.[7]

The Nizaris of the Alamut period produced a few doctrinal works, starting with Hasan-i Sabbah's *Fusul-i arbaʿa* ('The Four Chapters'), containing a reformulation of the old Shiʿi doctrine of *taʿlim* or authoritative teaching in religion, which was reaffirmed as the central doctrine of the earliest Nizaris.[8] There was, furthermore, the unique corpus of al-Tusi's Ismaili writings, including his *Rawdat al-taslim*,[9] completed in 640/1242 and representing the most detailed exposition of the Nizari Ismaili teachings of the late Alamut period. As noted, the early Persian Nizaris, as a rare instance of its kind amongst the Ismailis, also produced chronicles recording the detailed history of their state in terms of the reigns of the successive lords of Alamut, starting with the *Sargudhasht-i Sayyidna* which covered the life and times of Hasan-i Sabbah. These official chronicles, compiled by various Persian Nizari authors, were maintained at Alamut and other Nizari strongholds in Rudbar as well as in Quhistan, especially at Sartakht and Mu'minabad. The available information on these Nizari chronicles will be presented later in this article. It is interesting to note here that the Syrian branch of the Nizari state did not develop a similar tradition of historiography during the Alamut period and that the Syrian Nizari authors of the time do not seem to have compiled

any chronicles like those maintained in Persia, while the Persian chronicles contained only occasional references to the events of the Syrian Nizari community. On the other hand, the contemporary, non-Ismaili Arab historians, who took some notice of the Syrian Nizaris, ignored almost completely the events of the Persian Nizari community. In Persia itself, it was only during the Ilkhanid period, after the collapse of the Nizari state, that a number of Sunni historians concerned themselves seriously with the Persian Nizaris of the Alamut period and their state.

Hülegü, entrusted by the Great Khan Möngke with the double task of destroying the Nizari Ismaili state of Persia and the Abbasid caliphate, entered Khurasan at the head of the main Mongol expedition in Rabiʿ I 654/April 1256; and by Dhu'l-Qaʿda 654/December 1256, when Alamut surrendered to the Mongols, the Nizari state had been uprooted in Persia. Only Lamasar, the second most important fortress in Rudbar, held out for a year longer, while Girdkuh resisted its Mongol besiegers as the last Nizari military outpost in Persia until 669/1270. The Nizari strongholds of Rudbar and Quhistan were pillaged and then completely or partially demolished by the invading Mongols during the year 654/1256, marking the end of the Nizari state in Persia. The Mongols also put large numbers of Nizaris to the sword in Persia, but they did not succeed in totally extirpating the Persian Nizari community. The bulk of the literature produced by the Persian Nizaris during the Alamut period, however, perished in the course of the Mongol invasions. Only a few important Nizari works, including some of the official historical writings, did in various ways survive the Mongol destructions. These Nizari works were seen and utilised extensively but selectively by a group of Persian historians of the Ilkhanid period, notably, Juwayni, Rashid al-Din and Kashani, who now compiled detailed historical accounts of the Persian Nizari community and state of the Alamut period. Most of the Nizari sources used by these Persian historians, including all the Nizari chronicles available to them, were lost soon after the first half of the 8th/14th century. As a result, the same Persian historians have remained our most important authorities on the subject, not only because of their proximity to the described events but also because of their use of contemporary Ismaili sources which are no longer extant.

ʿAlaʾ al-Din ʿAta-Malik Juwayni is the earliest historian of Mongol Persia to produce an account of the Persian Nizaris of the Alamut period. Born in 623/1226, Juwayni entered the service of the Mongols in his youth, and then, from 654/1256 until his death in 681/1283, continued in the service of Hülegü and his descendants in the Ilkhanid dynasty of Persia. Thus Juwayni was an eyewitness of the Mongol invasions in Persia, and he personally participated in the final events leading to the downfall of the Nizari Ismaili state there. Juwayni was with Hülegü when the Mongols converged on Rudbar in 654/1256, and laid siege to the Nizari fortresses of Alamut, Lamasar and Maymundiz. Having taken part in the final round of negotiations between Hülegü and Rukn al-Din Khurshah, the Nizari imam of the time and the last lord of Alamut, it was Juwayni who drew up the Mongol *yarligh* or decree granting Khurshah safe conduct from Maymundiz. He was also responsible for composing the *Fath-nama* or proclamation of victory, declaring the defeat and surrender of the Nizaris. Juwayni, furthermore, relates how, with Hülegü's permission, he examined the celebrated Ismaili library at Alamut, from where he selected many 'choice books', before consigning to the flames those treatises which, in his view, related to the heresy and error of the Ismailis. Of the latter category, however, Juwayni preserved a number of works, including the *Sargudhasht-i Sayyidna*, which he quotes extensively.

Juwayni commenced the compilation of his history of the Mongols and their conquests, the *Ta'rikh-i jahan-gusha*, around the year 650/1252, when he visited Möngke's court in Mongolia, and finally stopped working on it in 658/1260. Juwayni's account of the Nizari state, added to the end of the third volume of his history, was thus committed to writing soon after the fall of Alamut.[10] Juwayni produced a comprehensive account of Hasan-i Sabbah and the seven subsequent supreme leaders of the Nizari state, based on the Nizari chronicles and other source materials, including some non-extant local histories of the Caspian region, which he found at Alamut and possibly other Nizari strongholds. Juwayni's account of the Nizari state is preceded by a section relating to the history of the early Ismailis and the Fatimid dynasty,[11] a pattern adopted also by Rashid al-Din and Kashani. However, as a Sunni historian and Mongol official aiming to please his master, Hülegü, who had destroyed the Nizari state in

Persia, Juwayni was extremely hostile towards the Ismailis. Using an arsenal of invectives and defamatory epithets against the Ismailis throughout his narrative, Juwayni does not miss any opportunity to express his contempt for the Nizaris and their leaders.

Chronologically, the second chief Persian authority on the Nizari state in Persia is Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah, the famous historian and statesman of the Ilkhanid period. Born around 645/1247 into the Jewish faith and originally trained as a physician, Rashid al-Din converted to Islam at the age of thirty and rose in the service of the Mongol Ilkhans of Persia to the rank of vizier, which he held for almost twenty years until his execution in 718/1318. In 694/1295, the Ilkhan Ghazan commissioned Rashid al-Din to compile a detailed history of the Mongols and their conquests. It was at the request of Ghazan's brother and successor, Öljeytü, that Rashid al-Din expanded his already vast official history, the *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh* ('Collection of Histories'), to cover the histories of all the important Eurasian peoples, including the Chinese, Indians, Jews, Ismailis and Franks, with whom the Mongols had come into contact during their conquests. On its completion in 710/1310, Rashid al-Din's *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh* had, indeed, acquired the distinction of being the first history of the world written in any language. Rashid al-Din's history of the Ismailis covering both the Nizaris and the earlier Ismailis, was compiled as a part of the second volume of the *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh*.[12]

In completing his history of the Ismailis in 710/1310, Rashid al-Din undoubtedly utilised Juwayni's work, copies of which were already numerous at that time, and which Rashid al-Din often follows closely. In addition, it is certain that Rashid al-Din had direct access to other copies of the Ismaili sources used by Juwayni, along with some other Nizari texts and documents still extant at the time. These Ismaili sources must have originally belonged to the collections held at fortresses other than Alamut, or else they had been in the private libraries of individual Nizaris. As it was one of the methods adopted in compiling the *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh*, it is indeed quite possible that Rashid al-Din had established personal contacts with some Nizaris who owned such manuscripts. In this connection, it may be noted that Rashid al-Din's grandfather, Muwaffaq al-Dawla Hamadani, as well as the latter's brother Raʾis al-Dawla, had been at Alamut as guests for

some time until the Mongol invasions. It is quite likely that Muwaffaq al-Dawla, a learned man trained as a physician who, like al-Tusi, was subsequently received into Hülegü's service, might have come into the possession of some Ismaili works, in addition to developing friendly relations with the Nizaris. In any case, Rashid al-Din quotes extensively from the Nizari chronicles of the Alamut period, which he names, and he relates many details absent in Juwayni's account. In addition, Rashid al-Din, always keen to locate the most reliable source materials, made a fuller and a more critical use of the general historical works available in Mongol Persia, also displaying a sense of objectivity not found in any other Sunni historian writing about the Ismailis. In sum, Rashid al-Din's history of the Nizaris is much fuller and clearly less hostile than Juwayni's account.

Jamal al-Din Abu'l-Qasim ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAli Kashani was the third and last of the major Persian historians of the Mongol period writing on the Nizari Ismailis. Few biographical details are known about this Imami Shiʿi chronicler who belonged to the famous Abu Tahir family of potters from Kashan and died around 738/1337. He was a secretary in the service of the Mongol Ilkhans Öljeytü and Abu Saʿid (717–736/1317–1335), the last effective member of the Ilkhanid dynasty, who ordered Rashid al-Din's execution. It is also known that Kashani was associated with Rashid al-Din and participated in compiling sections of the *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh*, although Kashani claims that he himself was the real author of that work.[13] Kashani composed a few works, including a general history of the Muslim world until the Mongol invasions. The latter chronicle, the *Zubdat al-tawarikh*, dedicated to Öljeytü, contains a section on the history of the Ismailis, covering the early Ismailis, the Fatimid dynasty and the events of the Nizari state in Persia.[14] Needless to add that, as in the cases of Juwayni and Rashid al-Din, the most important part of Kashani's Ismaili history relates to the early Persian Nizaris. Kashani's history of the Ismailis is very much similar to Rashid al-Din's account and is closely related to it. However, Kashani's version is fuller and it contains numerous details missing in Rashid al-Din. Kashani also reproduces some Nizari documents not quoted by Rashid al-Din. It seems, therefore, that Kashani either had independent access to Rashid al-Din's Ismaili sources or perhaps utilised a longer version

of Rashid al-Din's Ismaili history which has not survived. It is also possible that Kashani's account is actually that same longer version compiled under the direction of Rashid al-Din.

Later Persian historians who devoted separate sections of various lengths to the Nizaris of the Alamut period in their general histories, starting with Hamd Allah Mustawfi Qazwini (d. after 740/1339–1340),[15] based their accounts mainly on Juwayni and Rashid al-Din. Amongst such historians, Nur al-Din ʿAbd Allah b. Lutf Allah al-Bihdadini, better known as Hafiz-i Abru (d. 833/1430), produced the longest account of the Persian Nizari state in his universal history, the *Majmaʿ al-tawarikh al-sultaniyya*. This Sunni historian of the Timurid period, who became the official chronicler in the court of Shahrukh and wrote his vast universal history at the request of the Timurid Baysunghur, followed Rashid al-Din's account very closely in his history of the Ismailis.[16] None of the later Persian historians had direct access to genuine Ismaili sources of the Alamut period, including the Nizari chronicles, which were evidently no longer extant in post-Mongol Persia; and, therefore, they do not add any new details to the earlier, major accounts of the Persian Nizaris produced by Juwayni, Rashid al-Din and Kashani. In the meantime, medieval Persian historiography had continued to be hostile towards the Nizaris, perpetuating aspects of the 'black legend' about the Ismailis and which had been fabricated by earlier Sunni historians and polemicists like Ibn Rizam; while the Crusaders and their occidental chroniclers had been generating their own legendary accounts of the Nizari Ismailis, who acquired the designation of 'Assassins' in medieval Europe.

Under these circumstances, Juwayni, Rashid al-Din and Kashani have remained our principal authorities, despite their biases and distortions, on the early Persian Nizari Ismailis. Unlike Juwayni, who normally does not cite his Nizari chronicles, Rashid al-Din and Kashani reveal important details on the historical writings of the Persian Nizaris during the Alamut period. All three authorities, however, name the *Sargudhasht-i Sayyidna* as their main source for Hasan-i Sabbah's biography.[17] This work, the first part of which may have been autobiographical, also contained a detailed account of the major events of Hasan-i Sabbah's rule as the first lord of Alamut and, as such, it may be regarded as the first official chronicle compiled by the

Persian Nizaris. Rashid al-Din and Kashani mention another anonymous Nizari chronicle, *Kitab-i Buzurg-Ummid*, which was utilised extensively for their accounts of the reign of Kiya Buzurg-Ummid (518–532/1124–1138), the second lord of Alamut.[18] Both Rashid al-Din and Kashani also make explicit references to a Nizari history compiled by a certain Dihkhuda ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAli Fashandi, which was used as their sole source for the events pertaining to the first part of the reign of Muhammad b. Buzurg-Ummid (532–557/1138–1162), the third lord of Alamut.[19] No details are available on this Persian Nizari chronicler, except that Buzurg-Ummid evidently had designated him as the commander (*kutval*) of Maymundiz after that fortress began to be constructed in 520/1127.[20] In writing the second part of Muhammad b. Buzurg-Ummid's reign, both historians utilised yet another Nizari chronicle, the *Ta'rikh* of Ra'is Hasan Salah (al-Din) Munshi, written in the time of Shihab al-Din Mansur.[21] Shihab al-Din was the *muhtasham* or chief *daʿi* of the Nizaris of Quhistan during the earlier decades of the 7th/13th century and died soon after 644/1246. Ra'is Hasan, a native of Birjand in Quhistan, was also a poet and a secretary or *munshi* in the service of Shihab al-Din, who was a learned man himself.[22] Ra'is Hasan, who may also have been known as Hasan-i Mahmud Katib, rose to a high secretarial post in Nizari Quhistan and was entrusted with writing Shihab al-Din's reply to certain questions put to the *muhtasham* by Nasir al-Din al-Tusi who, in his spiritual autobiography, refers to Ra'is Hasan with the honorific epithet of *malik al-kuttab*.[23] This correspondence dates to the earliest years of the reign of Imam ʿAla' al-Din Muhammad III (618–653/1221–1255), the penultimate lord of Alamut. Ra'is Hasan probably wrote his *Ta'rikh* around the same time, in the early 620s/1220s.

For the reigns of the last five lords of Alamut (557–654/1162–1256), who were recognized as imams by the contemporary Nizari community, Rashid al-Din and Kashani do not name any specific chronicle, although the sections in question were evidently based on further Nizari chronicles in addition to oral sectarian traditions.[24] Rashid al-Din and Kashani also utilised and paraphrased Hasan-i Sabbah's theological writings as well as a number of the so-called *fusul* (singular, *fasl*), decrees or epistles, issued by the Nizari imams of the Alamut period, notably Hasan II *ʿala dhikrihi'l-salam* and his son

and successor Nur al-Din Muhammad II (561–607/1166–1210), the fourth and fifth lords of Alamut, who reigned during the period of the *qiyama* or spiritual resurrection.[25] Kashani has preserved long quotations from some of these *fusul*, which are not reproduced in Rashid al-Din's account.[26] Juwayni, too, makes frequent references to these *fusul* and similar documents, representing important archival materials.[27]

It is, indeed, due to the information provided by Rashid al-Din and Kashani, who lived in the richest period of Persian historical writing and also had access to an important corpus of Ismaili sources, that we owe our knowledge of the temporary tradition of Nizari historiography which had existed in Persia during the Alamut period. This rare tradition in the history of Ismailism was discontinued on the collapse of the Persian Nizari state in 654/1256, while the direct products of that tradition seem to have disappeared completely in Mongol Persia. Subsequently, the devastated and disorganized Persian Nizaris were once again obliged to live clandestinely, observing the strictest forms of *taqiyya* for at least two centuries. During these obscure early post-Alamut centuries, the Nizaris of different parts of Persia, who often sought refuge under the mantle of Sufism, did not engage in explicitly Ismaili literary activities. From the early Safawid times, when Shi'ism in general received the protection of the state in Persia, the Persian Nizari community began to reassert its identity more openly and a new type of Nizari literature began to appear. But the Persian Nizari works of the Safawid and later times were, once again, almost exclusively doctrinal, often permeated by Sufi and poetic forms of expression.[28] The Mongols had, indeed, irrevocably brought to a close the political power of the Persian Nizaris and that community's Alamuti tradition of historiography.

Notes

* A longer version of this chapter was originally published as 'Persian Historiography of the Early Nizari Isma'ilis', *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 30 (1992), pp. 91–97.

1. See W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran,

1963); Ismail K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Isma'ili Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977), and F. Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London, 2004).

2. Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man b. Muhammad, *Iftitah al-da'wa*, ed. W. al-Qadi (Beirut, 1970); also edited by F. Dachraoui (Tunis, 1975).

3. The *da'i* Idris produced several historical works dealing with the history of Ismailism in Yaman, but his major Ismaili history was a seven-volume work entitled the *'Uyun al-akhbar wa-funun al-athar*; volumes 4–6 of this history, carrying the narrative from the earliest period to the time of the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mustansir, were edited by the late Syrian Nizari scholar Mustafa Ghalib (Beirut, 1973–78). More recently, the seventh volume was edited, together with an English summary, by A. Fu'ad Sayyid, in collaboration with P.E. Walker and M.A. Pomerantz, as *The Fatimids and their Successors in Yaman* (London, 2002).

4. See H. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London, 1983), pp. 30–58; Paul E. Walker, 'Eternal Cosmos and the Womb of History: Time in Early Ismaili Thought', *IJMES*, 9 (1978), pp. 355–366; W. Madelung, 'Aspects of Isma'ili Theology: The Prophetic Chain and the God Beyond Being', in S.H. Nasr, ed., *Isma'ili Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Tehran, 1977), pp. 51–65, and F. Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 139 ff., 177–178, 218–219, 234, 236–239, 244, 291 ff., 393–394, 410–411.

5. For modern surveys of Nizari history during the Alamut period, see Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* (The Hague, 1955), pp. 37–278; idem, 'The Isma'ili State', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*: Volume 5, *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 422–482; Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (London, 1967), pp. 38–140, and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 324–434, 669–699.

6. See P. Casanova, 'Monnaie des Assassins de Perse', *Revue Numismatique*, 3 série, 11 (1893), pp. 343–352, and George C. Miles, 'Coins of the Assassins of Alamut', *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, 3 (1972), pp. 155–162.

7. See Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature*, pp. 134–136, and Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 260–263.

8. The *Fusul-i arba'a* has not survived, but it was fragmentarily quoted by Hasan-i Sabbah's contemporary al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153), the renowned theologian and heresiographer who may have been an Ismaili towards the end of his life; see Abu'l-Fath Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-milal wa'l-nihal,* ed. 'A.M. al-Wakil (Cairo, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 195–198; partial English translation, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, tr. A.K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn (London, 1984), pp. 167–170; also translated into English in Hodgson, *Order*,

pp. 325–328. This treatise was also seen and paraphrased by Juwayni and other chief Persian historians of the Ilkhanid period writing on the Ismailis.

9. Nasir al-Din Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Tusi, *Rawdat al-taslim, ya tasawwurat*, ed. and tr. W. Ivanow (Leiden, 1950); a better edition of this work is contained in S. Jalal Hosseini Badakhchani, *The Paradise of Submission* (D. Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1989), pp. 271–421. A new edition and complete English translation of this work by S.J. Badakhchani has now appeared under the title of *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought* (London, 2005).

10. *Ta'rikh-i jahan-gusha*, ed. Muhammad Qazwini (Leiden and London, 1912–37), vol. 3, pp. 186–278; English trans., *The History of the World-Conqueror*, tr. John A. Boyle (Manchester, 1958), vol. 2, pp. 666–725.

11. *Ibid*., vol. 3, pp. 142–168; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 666–725.

12. *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh: qismat-i Ismaʿiliyan va Fatimiyan va Nizariyan va daʿiyan va rafiqan*, ed. M.T. Danishpazhuh and M. Mudarrisi Zanjani (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959).

13. See his *Ta'rikh-i Uljaytu*, ed. M. Hambly (Tehran, 1348 Sh./1969), pp. 2, 5, 54–55, 196, 240.

14. *Zubdat al-tawarikh: bakhsh-i Fatimiyan va Nizariyan*, ed. M.T. Danishpazhuh (2nd ed., Tehran, 1366 Sh./1987). Kashani's Ismaili history does not seem to have been utilised by scholars before 1964, when its first edition, prepared by the late scholar of Persian manuscripts, Danishpazhuh (1911–1996), was published as the *Supplement* no. 9 to the *Revue de la Faculté des Lettres, Université de Tabriz* (1343 Sh./1964), pp. 1–215. Both editions of Kashani's Ismaili history have been based on the same manuscript dated 989/1581, which is the oldest known copy in the Tehran University Library.

15. *Ta'rikh-i guzida*, ed. ʿAbd al-Husayn Nava'i (Tehran, 1339 Sh./1960), pp. 518–528.

16. *Majmaʿ al-tawarikh al-sultaniyya: qismat-i khulafa'-i ʿAlawiyya-yi Maghrib va Misr va Nizariyan va rafiqan*, ed. M. Mudarrisi Zanjani (Tehran, 1364 Sh./1985), pp. 189–283, covering the events of the Persian Nizari state.

17. Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 187–189; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 666–668, Rashid al-Din, pp. 133–134; Kashani, pp. 133, 229; see also Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 253.

18. Rashid al-Din, p. 144; Kashani, p. 182.

19. Rashid al-Din, pp. 144, 153; Kashani, pp. 182, 190.

20. Rashid al-Din, p. 138.

21. *Ibid*., pp. 153, 161; Kashani, p. 198.

22. See W. Ivanow, 'An Ismaili Poem in Praise of Fidawis', *JBBRAS*, NS, 14

(1938), pp. 63–72; idem, *Ismaili Literature*, p. 134; Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 259–260, and F. Daftary, 'Birjandi, Ra'is Hasan', *Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam,* ed. S.M. Mirsalim et al. (Tehran, 1376 Sh.- /1996–), vol. 5, p. 150.

23. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Sayr va suluk*, in his *Majmu'a-yi rasa'il*, ed. M.T. Mudarris Radavi (Tehran, 1335 Sh./1956), p. 41; ed. and tr. S.J. Badakhchani as *Contemplation and Action: The Spiritual Autobiography of a Muslim Scholar* (London, 1998), text p. 6, translation pp. 30–31.

24. See Rashid al-Din, pp. 169–170, 195; Kashani, p. 208.

25. Rashid al-Din, pp. 163–167, 170; Kashani, pp. 201–203, 205, 208. See also Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature*, pp. 132–133.

26. See, for instance, Kashani, pp 211–213, 221.

27. Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 226–230, 234, 240, 244; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 688–691, 694, 698, 700.

28. One of the major exceptions, representing perhaps the only Ismaili history written by a Persian Nizari author during the post-Alamut period, is Muhammad b. Zayn al-'Abidin Fida'i Khurasani's *Kitab-i hidayat al-mu'minin al-talibin*, ed. A.A. Semenov (Moscow, 1959). Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1342/1923), the most learned Persian Nizari of modern times, wrote his history, which is filled with anachronisms and errors, around the year 1320/1903. By that time, it seems that the Persian Nizaris were rather ill-informed about the history of their community and the Ismaili movement in general.

7

Hasan-i Sabbah and the Origins of the Nizari Ismaili *Daʿwa* and State

This study is concerned with the background to, and the earliest history of, the Ismaili movement that appeared in Persia during the final decade of the 5th/11th century and subsequently became known as the Nizari branch of the Ismaili community; and the crucial role of Hasan-i Sabbah in organizing and leading the opening stage of that movement from his mountain headquarters at the fortress of Alamut.*

There are disagreements among modern scholars regarding the very nature of early Nizari Ismailism. While many Islamicists and Ismaili scholars have generally seen it as a mere schismatic Ismaili movement that split away from the Fatimid caliphate and the headquarters of the Fatimid Ismaili *daʿwa* in Cairo over the issue of succession to the Ismaili imamate, others (especially some modern Iranian scholars) have tended to view it in terms of an Iranian revolutionary movement with 'nationalistic' ideals. The reality, as is often the case, seems to have been much more complex. As no Nizari sources have survived from the time of Hasan-i Sabbah, it is impossible to know how the earliest Nizaris themselves perceived their community some nine centuries ago. At any rate, it was in the very heart of the Iranian world, in the medieval region of Daylam in northern Persia, that Nizari Ismailis first appeared on the historical stage, while the activities of the Persian Ismailis antedated the Nizari-Mustaʿli schism of 487/1094.

As is known, the Iranian lands lent their support to certain medieval Islamic movements opposed to the established caliphate,

notably Kharijism and Shiʿism. Of the various religio-political opposition movements in Islam, however, it was Shiʿism that produced the most lasting impact on the Iranian world. By the final decades of the 3rd/9th century, all the major branches of Shiʿism, including the Imamiyya, the Zaydiyya and the Ismaʿiliyya, had acquired communities of followers in the Iranian world. Imami or Twelver Shiʿism achieved its greatest success in Persia only under the Safawids who adopted it as the official religion of their realm, while the impact of the Zaydiyya, who by contrast to the quiescent Imamiyya had developed into a revolutionary movement, remained rather marginalized in the Iranian world. Ismaili Shiʿism had greater and more widespread impact on Persia than the Zaydi movement. By the end of the 3rd century/903–913, the Ismaili *daʿwa* had become well established in many parts of Persia.[1] Due to the remoteness of the Iranian regions from the central headquarters of the *daʿwa* and the poor communications systems of the time, the chief local *daʿi*s of the Iranian world enjoyed a large degree of independence and local initiative from early on, which gave Iranian Ismailism one of its distinctive features. This, in turn, permitted the Iranian *daʿi*s to modify their policies as required by local circumstances. The same spirit of local initiative and autonomy permitted many of the *daʿi*s of the Iranian lands to break away from the central headquarters of the Ismaili *daʿwa* in the aftermath of the schism of 286/899, which divided the early Ismaili movement into the loyal Fatimid Ismaili and the dissident (Qarmati) factions.[2]

The *daʿwa* activities on behalf of the Fatimid Ismaili imams did not cease upon the establishment of the Fatimid *dawla* or state in North Africa. The Fatimid *daʿwa* activities in the Iranian lands reached their peak in the time of al-Mustansir (427–487/1036–1094), the eighth Fatimid caliph and the eighteenth Ismaili imam. By the early decades of his rule, the eastern Qarmati communities had either disintegrated or switched their allegiance to the Fatimid *daʿwa*. It was also during the latter decades of al-Mustansir's long reign that the Fatimid state embarked on its political decline.

In the meantime, important changes had taken place in the political topography of the Iranian world. The internal strifes of the later Buyids in western Persia and Iraq, and the collapse of the Samanids and other native Iranian dynasties in Khwarazm, Transoxania and

Khurasan by the early decades of the 5th/11th century, had generally permitted the emergence of a number of Turkish dynasties in the Iranian lands. This trend toward the Turkish domination of the region began with the establishment of the Ghaznawid and Qarakhanid dynasties, and soon acquired a major significance under the Saljuqs who had originated as chieftains of the Oghuz Turks in the steppes of Central Asia. When Toghril, the Saljuq leader, proclaimed himself sultan at Nishapur in 429/1038, another alien reign, now Turkish instead of Arab, had begun in the Islamic history of the Iranian world.

The establishment of Turkish rule over the Iranian lands checked the rapid resurgence of Persian culture and Iranian 'national' sentiments.[3] It should be noted, however, that the process had become irrevocable by the 5th/11th century, when the conversion of the Iranians to Islam was finally completed. The Ismaili *daʿi* and theologian Nasir-i Khusraw (d. after 465/1072) now composed all of his works in the Persian language. Nizam al-Mulk, too, wrote his *Siyasat-nama* for Sultan Malik Shah in the Persian language. Indeed, the Saljuqs themselves soon (like the Abbasids) learned to appreciate the advantages of the Iranian system of statecraft and central administration. Be that as it may, the Turkish Saljuqs were aliens and their rule was intensely detested by the Iranians. The anti-Turkish feeling of the Iranian populace was further aggravated by the anarchy and depredation caused in towns and villages by the Turkmen, who were continuously attracted in new waves from Central Asia to Persia by the success of the Saljuqs. The Saljuqs with their *iqtaʿ* system of landholding had also accentuated the socio-economic grievances resulting from the existing stratified social structure in Persia. The insubordination of the Turkish tribes and the unruly behaviour of their soldiery continued throughout the entire period of the Great Saljuq sultanate and beyond.[4] The ground was thus rapidly being paved for the success of the anti-Saljuq activities of Persian Ismailis led by Hasan-i Sabbah.

By around 460/1067, the Persian Ismailis in the Saljuq territories had come under the authority of a single chief *daʿi* who had his secret headquarters at Isfahan, the main Saljuq capital. The chief *daʿi* in Persia at this time was ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAttash. A highly learned *daʿi*, Ibn ʿAttash seems to have been the first Iranian *daʿi* to have organized

the various Ismaili communities of the Saljuq territories in Persia, and possibly Iraq, under a central leadership. This new institutional frame was essentially retained in subsequent times and it was utilized effectively by Hasan-i Sabbah. Ibn ʿAttash occupies a particularly important place in the annals of Iranian Nizari Ismailism for his role in launching the career of Hasan-i Sabbah.

Little information is available on the early life of Hasan-i Sabbah whose career as the first lord of Alamut is better documented. The Nizaris compiled chronicles recording the detailed history of the Persian Nizari state and community according to the reigns of the successive lords of Alamut.[5] This Nizari tradition of historiography started with a work known as the *Sargudhasht-i Sayyidna* (*Biography of our Master*), which covered the major events of Hasan-i Sabbah's rule as the first lord of Alamut.[6] Copies of this work, as in the case of other Nizari chronicles, were kept at the famous library in Alamut, founded by Hasan-i Sabbah, as well as in other Nizari fortresses. As is well-known, the bulk of the literature produced by the Persian Nizaris during the Alamut period perished in the course of the Mongol destruction of the Nizari strongholds in Persia in 654/1256. However, the *Sargudhasht-i Sayyidna* was among the few Nizari works that in different ways survived into the Ilkhanid times. These Nizari sources were seen and utilized extensively by a group of Persian historians of the Ilkhanid period, notably Juwayni (d. 681/1283), Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah (d. 718/1318), and Kashani (d. ca. 738/1337). These historians compiled detailed accounts of the Persian Nizari state and community of the Alamut period, and they constitute our primary sources for Hasan-i Sabbah's life and career.[7] Later Persian historians, such as Hafiz-i Abru (d. 833/1430),[8] who devoted lengthy sections to Hasan-i Sabbah and the Persian Nizaris of the Alamut period, based their accounts almost exclusively on Juwayni and Rashid al-Din.

Hasan-i Sabbah was born in the mid-440s/1050s in Qumm, into a Twelver Shiʿi family. His father, ʿAli b. Muhammad b. Jaʿfar b. al-Husayn b. Muhammad b. al-Sabbah al-Himyari, a Kufan claiming Himyari Yamani origins, had migrated from Kufa to Qumm. Subsequently, the Sabbah family moved to the nearby town of Rayy, another important centre of Shiʿi learning in Persia, where the youthful Hasan received his early religious education as a Twelver Shiʿi. It

was at Rayy, a centre of Ismaili activity, that Hasan, soon after the age of seventeen, was introduced to Ismaili teachings by a certain Amira Darrab, one of the several local *daʿi*s. Later, Hasan found out more about the Ismailis from other *daʿi*s in Rayy, including Abu Nasr Sarraj. Soon afterwards, Hasan converted to the Ismaili faith and the oath of allegiance (*bayʿa*) to the Imam al-Mustansir was administered to him by a *daʿi* called Muʾmin. In Ramadan 464/May-June 1072, the newly initiated Hasan was brought to the attention of Ibn ʿAttash, who was then staying in Rayy. Ibn ʿAttash approved of Hasan and appointed him to a post in the *daʿwa*, also instructing him to proceed to Cairo to further his Ismaili education. In 467/1074–75, Ibn ʿAttash returned from Rayy to Isfahan, the *daʿwa* headquarters in Persia, accompanied by Hasan-i Sabbah.

According to quotations from the *Sargudhasht*, Hasan-i Sabbah finally set off from Isfahan for Cairo in 469/1076–77, when al-Muʾayyad fiʾl-Din al-Shirazi (d. 470/1078) was still the chief *daʿi* (*daʿi al-duʿat*) there. He travelled to Adharbayjan and then to Mayyafariqin, from where he was driven out by the town's *qadi* for having asserted, in a religious disputation, the exclusive right of the Ismaili imam to interpret religion and refuting the authority of the Sunni *ʿulama*, ideas which he later elaborated in terms of the doctrine of *taʿlim*. He finally arrived in Cairo in Safar 471/August 1078, the same year in which the Fatimids lost Syria to Tutush, who established a Saljuq principality there. Hasan spent some three years in Egypt, first in Cairo and then in Alexandria, a base of opposition to Badr al-Jamali, the all-powerful Fatimid vizier and 'commander of the armies' (*amir al-juyush*). Badr al-Jamali had now succeeded al-Muʾayyad also as the *daʿi al-duʿat*.

Almost nothing is known about Hasan's experiences in Egypt. It is certain, however, that he did not have an audience with al-Mustansir. According to the later Nizari sources used by our Persian historians, he also came into conflict with Badr al-Jamali, evidently because of his support for Nizar, al-Mustansir's heir-designate. According to another account, cited by Ibn al-Athir, al-Mustansir had personally informed Hasan in Cairo that his successor would be Nizar.[9] At any rate, eventually Hasan seems to have been banished from Egypt, under obscure circumstances and on Badr al-Jamali's order. He returned to Isfahan in Dhuʾl-Hijja 473/June 1081.

Hasan must have learned important lessons during his stay in Fatimid Egypt, which were to be taken into account in his subsequent revolutionary designs. By the 460s/1070s, when the Fatimid state was witnessing numerous political, economic and military crises, the Persian Ismailis must have already become aware of the declining fortunes of the Fatimids. Subsequently in al-Mustansir's reign, Badr al-Jamali did restore peace and some prosperity to Fatimid Egypt, but henceforth the power of the Fatimids remained manifestly inferior to that of the Saljuqs who had firmly established their own hegemony throughout the Near East, to the utter disillusionment of different Shiʿi communities there. Whilst in Egypt, the shrewd Hasan-i Sabbah had a valuable opportunity to evaluate at close hand the conditions of the Fatimid regime, becoming better aware of the fact that the Persian Ismailis could no longer count on receiving any effective support from the Fatimid state.

In Persia, Hasan did not remain at the *daʿwa* headquarters in Isfahan for long. Instead, he embarked on an extensive programme of journeys to different localities in the service of the *daʿwa* for the next nine years. Doubtless, it was during this period that he formulated his own ideas and strategy, also assessing the military strength of the Saljuqs in different parts of Persia. By the late 470s/1080s, he had concentrated his efforts on the general region of Daylam, removed from the centres of Saljuq power and also predominantly Shiʿi. He was then preparing for a revolt against the Saljuqs, for the implementation of which he was systematically searching for a site to establish his headquarters. At the time, the *daʿwa* in Persia was still under the overall leadership of Ibn ʿAttash, but Hasan had already started to concern himself with a particular policy. By around 480/1087–88, Hasan seems to have selected the castle of Alamut, situated in the region of Rudbar in Daylam, on a high rock in central Alburz mountains, as a suitable site for his headquarters.[10] He then devised a detailed plan for the seizure of Alamut, which at the time was in the hands of a certain ʿAlid called Mahdi who held the castle from the Saljuq sultan. He despatched a number of subordinate *daʿi*s to various districts around Alamut to convert the local inhabitants. Hasan-i Sabbah, who was in due course appointed *daʿi* of Daylam, was now truly reinvigorating the *daʿwa* activities in northern Persia, and his efforts

were soon brought to the notice of Nizam al-Mulk, who remained vizier for some thirty years under Toghril's next two successors, Alp Arslan (455–465/1063–1073) and Malik Shah (465–485/1073–1092). The Saljuq vizier, who nurtured a deep hatred for the Ismailis, failed to capture Hasan, who in due time arrived in Rudbar.

Early in 483/1090, Hasan arrived in the neighbourhood of Alamut, where he stayed for some time disguising himself as a schoolteacher. On the eve of Wednesday 6 Rajab 483/4 September 1090, Hasan entered the castle of Alamut clandestinely calling himself Dihkhuda. He lived there for a while in disguise, teaching the children of the garrison and infiltrating the castle with his own men. With his followers firmly installed in and around Alamut, Hasan finally divulged his true identity. Realizing that his position at Alamut was no longer tenable, Mahdi now agreed to surrender the castle peacefully. According to quotations from the *Sargudhasht*, Hasan voluntarily gave Mahdi a draft for 3,000 gold dinars as the price of the castle. The draft, drawn on Ra'is Muzaffar, a secret Ismaili convert then in the service of the Saljuqs who was to become the commander of the fortress of Girdkuh, was honoured in due time, to Mahdi's amazement.

The seizure of Alamut signalled the initiation of the Persian Ismailis' revolt against the Saljuqs, also marking the effective foundation of what was to become the Nizari state. It thus ushered in a new phase in the activities of the Persian Ismailis who had hitherto operated clandestinely. It is certain that Cairo had played no part in the initiation of this policy in Persia. Not only there is no evidence suggesting that Hasan-i Sabbah was receiving instructions from Badr al-Jamali, then the all-powerful Fatimid vizier and chief *da'i* in Cairo, but the sources, as noted, indicate the existence of serious disagreements between the two men from the time of Hasan's visit to Egypt. Once installed at Alamut, Hasan embarked on the task of renovating that old castle, also improving its fortifications, storage facilities and water supply system. He made Alamut truly impregnable, enabling it to withstand long sieges. He also improved and extended the cultivation and irrigation systems of the Alamut valley, making the locality self-sufficient in its food production. Similar policies were later implemented in connection with other major Ismaili strongholds.

Hasan-i Sabbah was no ordinary man, and as Marshall Hodgson (1922–1968) has noted, 'his personality may well have offered the other Ismailis a crucial rallying-point of unyielding strength'.[11] He was indeed held in great esteem by the Nizaris who referred to him as Sayyidna, or 'our master'. An organizer and a political strategist of the highest calibre, he was at the same time a learned scholar who led an ascetic life. Our Persian historians relate that during all the thirty-four years that Hasan spent at Alamut, he never descended from the castle, and only twice left his living quarters in the castle to mount the roof-top. The rest of the time, adds Rashid al-Din, he passed inside his quarters reading books, committing the teachings of the *da'wa* to writing, and administering the affairs of his realm.[12] He was equally strict with friend and foe, and highly uncompromising in his austere lifestyle. It is reported that he observed the *shari'a* strictly and imposed it on the community. In his time, nobody drank wine openly in the Alamut valley. At a time of siege, Hasan sent his wife and daughters to Girdkuh, where they were to earn a simple living by spinning, like other womenfolk there; and they were never brought back to Alamut. This evidently set a precedent for the commanders of the Ismaili fortresses.

Hasan-i Sabbah seems to have had a complex set of religio-political motives for his activist policies against the Saljuqs. As an Ismaili Shi'i he clearly could not have tolerated the ardently Sunni Saljuq Turks. Less conspicuously, but of equal significance, Hasan's revolt was also an expression of Iranian 'national' sentiments, which accounts for a major share of the early support extended to the Persian Ismailis. It cannot be doubted that Hasan truly detested the Turks and their alien rule over Persia. He is reported to have said that the Saljuq sultan was a mere ignorant Turk,[13] and that the Turks were *jinn* and not men, descendants of Adam.[14] It was under such circumstances that Hasan rapidly organized the Persian Ismailis of diverse backgrounds. Henceforth, the ordinary Persian Ismailis, as was fitting in the context of their struggle against the Saljuqs, were to address one another as *rafiq*, comrade. It is also extremely important to note that Hasan, obviously as an expression of his Persian awareness and in spite of his Islamic piety, took an unprecedented step from early on of substituting Persian for Arabic as the religious language of the

Nizari Ismailis of Persia. This was indeed the first time that a major Muslim community had adopted Persian as its religious language. This explains why the literature of the Persian-speaking (Nizari) Ismailis of the Alamut period and later times was produced entirely in the Persian language.

After firmly establishing himself at Alamut, Hasan-i Sabbah concerned himself with extending his influence in the region, by winning more Ismaili converts and gaining possession of more castles in Rudbar and adjacent areas in Daylam. Hasan took such castles whenever he could and wherever he found a suitable rock he built a castle upon it. Hasan's religio-political message evoked the popular support of the Daylamis of Rudbar and its environs, mostly villagers and highlanders who had already been introduced to Ismaili and other forms of Shiʿism. There is evidence suggesting that Hasan also attracted the remnants of some of the earlier Khurramis of Adharbayjan who, as an expression of their Persian sentiments, now called themselves Parsiyan.[15] Soon, Hasan's headquarters began to be raided by the forces of the nearest Saljuq amir who held the district of Alamut as his *iqtaʿ* granted by the sultan. Henceforth, the Saljuqs and the Persian Ismailis were drawn into an endless series of military encounters.

In 484/1091–92, Hasan sent Husayn-i Qa'ini, a capable *daʿi* who had played an important role in the seizure of Alamut, to his native Quhistan to mobilize support there. In Quhistan, a barren region in south-eastern Khurasan, Husayn met with immediate success. The Quhistanis, who were already familiar with Shiʿi traditions, were at the time highly discontented with the oppressive rule of a local Saljuq amir. As a result, the spread of the Ismaili *daʿwa* there did not proceed simply in terms of secret conversions and the seizure of castles, but it erupted openly into a popular uprising. Thus, in many parts of Quhistan the Ismailis rose in open revolt, also seizing control of several major towns, including Tun, Tabas and Qa'in. Quhistan now became another major territory, along with Rudbar in Daylam, for the activities of the Persian Ismailis. And in both territories, in less than two years after the capture of Alamut, the Persian Ismailis had effectively asserted their local independence from the Saljuqs. Hasan-i Sabbah had now actually founded an autonomous territorial state for the Persian Ismailis in the midst of the Saljuq sultanate.

Early in 485/1092, realizing that local Saljuq forces could not deal with the growing power of the Persian Ismailis, Malik Shah decided, on the advice of Nizam al-Mulk, to send armies against the Ismailis of both Rudbar and Quhistan. These military operations were, however, soon terminated due to the assassination of Nizam al-Mulk in Ramadan 485/October 1092, followed by Malik Shah's death a few weeks later. On hearing the news of the sultan's death, the Saljuq armies besieging Alamut and Ismaili sites in Quhistan dispersed, as the Saljuq forces traditionally owed their allegiance to the person of the ruler rather than the state.

On Malik Shah's death, the Saljuq empire was thrown into civil war which lasted more than a decade. Malik Shah's succession was disputed among his sons, who were supported by different Saljuq amirs; and these amirs, who controlled various provinces, continuously changed their allegiance and aggravated the internal disorders of the Saljuq sultanate. It was under such circumstances that Barkiyaruq, Malik Shah's eldest son and the most prominent claimant to the Saljuq sultanate, was placed on the throne in Rayy. However, Barkiyaruq (487–498/1094–1105) had to devote much of his energy to fighting his relatives, especially his half-brother Muhammad Tapar who received effective support from his own full brother Sanjar, the ruler of Khurasan from 490/1097 onwards. Peace was restored to the Saljuq dominions, especially in western Persia and Iraq, only on Barkiyaruq's death in 498/1105, when Muhammad Tapar emerged as the undisputed sultan while Sanjar remained at Balkh as his viceroy in the east.

During this period of rivalries among the Saljuqs, Hasan-i Sabbah found the much needed respite to consolidate and extend his power. The chaos caused by the quarrelling Saljuqs also made the Persians more responsive to Hasan's message of resistance against the alien and oppressive rule of the Saljuq Turks. Important Ismaili strongholds were now acquired in other parts of Persia, outside Daylam and Quhistan. Extending their network of fortresses eastwards from Alamut in the Alburz range, the Ismailis came to possess a number of castles near Damghan, capital of the medieval province of Qumis, especially Girdkuh which was situated strategically on a high rock along the main route between western Persia and Khurasan.[16] They

also seized several fortresses near Arrajan in the Zagros mountains, in the border region between the provinces of Fars and Khuzistan in south-western Persia, and acquired supporters in many towns throughout the Saljuq domains.

Meanwhile, Hasan had strengthened and extended his position in Daylam itself, where the Ismailis repelled intermittent Saljuq offensives. His greatest achievement in Daylam during this period was his acquisition of the castle of Lamasar, also called Lanbasar, to the west of Alamut in 489/1096.[17] Hasan-i Sabbah entrusted the Lamasar campaign to Kiya Buzurg-Ummid and three other commanders who seized the fortress by assault. Hasan then appointed Buzurg-Ummid as the commander of that second most important Ismaili stronghold in Daylam. Buzurg-Ummid stayed at Lamasar until he was summoned to Alamut in 518/1124 to succeed Hasan-i Sabbah. In order to understand the Iranian connection of the early Nizari community it is also important to bear in mind that its key figures, besides Hasan himself, were all Iranians who led the movement during its crucial early phase in their native territories: the Daylami Buzurg-Ummid in Daylam, the Khurasani Husayn-i Qa'ini in Quhistan, the Arrajani Abu Hamza in Arrajan, and Ra'is Muzaffar, who had served as a Saljuq officer in Qumis, was retained at Girdkuh, etc. Furthermore, they were all commanders and capable military strategists well suited to the task at hand, rather than theologians and philosophers like those who produced the classical treatises of the Fatimid period.

The struggle of the Persian Ismailis against the Saljuqs soon acquired its distinctive pattern as well as its particular methods, which were appropriate to the times.[18] After Malik Shah, and even earlier, there was no longer a single all-powerful sultan to be overthrown by a large army, even if such an army could be mobilized by the Ismailis. Political and military power had by then come to be localized in the hands of numerous amirs and commanders of garrisons, individuals who had received *iqtaʿ* assignments throughout the Saljuq dominions. In such a regime of many amirs, with no major military targets of conquest, the overthrow of, or the resistance against, the Saljuqs, who were persecuting the Ismailis in a widespread manner, had to proceed on a piecemeal basis, locality by locality, stronghold

by stronghold, and amir by amir. This reality was clearly recognized by Hasan-i Sabbah who devised an appropriate strategy for the revolt of the Persian Ismailis, aiming to resist or defeat the Saljuqs by acquiring a multiplicity of strongholds. Each Ismaili stronghold, normally a defensible and fortified mountain fortress, could then be used as the base of operations for the activities of the armed Ismaili of a particular locality. Such strongholds were also well placed for providing assistance to, or serving as refuge for, the Ismailis of other localities in times of need.

The commanders of the major Ismaili strongholds enjoyed a large degree of local initiative while each Ismaili territory was under the overall leadership of a regional chief, appointed from Alamut. The regional chiefs, too, acted independently in the daily affairs of their communities. All this contributed to the dynamism of the revolt. However, all the regional Ismaili leaders received their main instructions from Alamut, which served as the central and coordinating headquarters of the Nizari Ismailis. And the multiplicity of Ismaili strongholds, localities, and territories, formed a single, cohesive community, united in its sense of mission.

The same decentralized structure of existing power and the vastly superior military strength of the Saljuqs suggested to Hasan-i Sabbah the use of an auxiliary technique for resisting incessant attacks or attaining military and political victories: the vastly misunderstood technique of assassination. Hasan did not invent assassination as a political weapon. Many earlier Muslim communities, such as some of the early Shiʿi *ghulat* and the Khawarij, had resorted to this policy; and at the time of the revolt of the Persian Ismailis, when authority was distributed locally and on a personal basis, assassination was commonly resorted to by all factions, including the Saljuqs and the Crusaders. Hasan used this policy systematically but very selectively with the commencement of the struggle of the Persian Ismailis against the much more powerful Saljuqs. This policy was maintained by Hasan's successors at Alamut, though it gradually lost its importance. At any rate, this policy became identified in a highly exaggerated manner with the Nizari Ismailis so that almost any assassination of any religious, political or military significance in the central Islamic lands during the Alamut period was attributed to them.

The selective Nizari missions were carried out by their *fida'i*s or *fidawi*s, the young self-sacrificing devotees of the community who offered themselves on a voluntary basis. Few details are known about the recruitment and training of the *fida'i*s, who were glorified for their bravery and devotion.[19] Rolls of honour of their names and missions were evidently compiled and retained at Alamut and probably other fortresses.[20] The *fida'i*s do not seem to have received any training in languages and other subjects, as suggested by the elaborate accounts of the occidental chroniclers of the Crusaders and later European writers. In fact, the Crusaders and other Westerners were responsible for fabricating and putting into circulation a number of interconnected tales regarding the recruitment and training of the Nizari Ismaili *fida'i*s, who personally volunteered to sacrifice their lives, as a matter of conviction, in the service of their religion and community.[21] From early on, the assassinations were often countered by the massacres of Ismailis.[22]

As Hasan-i Sabbah was successfully implementing his strategy, the Ismaili *da'wa* suffered its greatest internal conflict. In Dhu'l-Hijja 487/December 1094, the Fatimid caliph-imam Abu Tamim Ma'add al-Mustansir bi'llah died in Cairo after an eventful reign of almost sixty years. The dispute over his succession was to split the Ismailis permanently into two separate factions.[23] A few months earlier, Badr al-Jamali, the real political master of the Fatimid state during the last two decades of al-Mustansir's reign, had died after arranging for his son al-Afdal to succeed him as vizier and commander of the armies. Al-Mustansir had earlier designated his eldest surviving son Abu Mansur Nizar (437–488/1045–1095) as his successor to the caliphate and imamate by the Shi'i rule of the *nass*. However, al-Afdal, aiming to strengthen his own dictatorial position, had other plans. Immediately upon al-Mustansir's death and in what amounted to a palace *coup d'état*, al-Afdal moved swiftly with the support of the army and placed Nizar's much younger half-brother Abu'l-Qasim Ahmad (467–495/1074–1101) on the Fatimid throne with the caliphal title of al-Musta'li bi'llah. Al-Musta'li, al Mustansir's youngest son who was also married to al-Afdal's sister, was to remain entirely dependent on his powerful vizier. The dispossessed Nizar, who had refused to endorse al-Afdal's designs, fled to Alexandria where he rose in revolt early in

488/1095 with much local support. There, Nizar was declared caliph with the title of al-Mustafa li-Din Allah and received the allegiance of the inhabitants of Alexandria. The declaration of Nizar as caliph and imam in Alexandria is attested to by numismatic evidence which came to light in 1994. The legends of this newly recovered gold dinar, the first known specimen of its kind, minted in Alexandria in 488 AH at the time of Nizar's rising there, bear the inscriptions *al-Mustafa li-Din Allah* and *daʿa al-Imam Nizar*.[24] Nizar was initially successful and his forces advanced to the vicinity of Cairo, but he was eventually defeated by al-Afdal. In the event, Nizar surrendered and was taken to Cairo where he was imprisoned and then immured; all of these events taking place during the year 488/1095. Subsequently, Nizar's partisans in Egypt were quickly suppressed by al-Afdal.

The dispute over al-Mustansir's succession resulted in a permanent schism, dividing the Fatimid Ismailis into two rival factions. The imamate of al-Mustaʿli, who had been installed to the Fatimid caliphate, was recognized by the Ismailis of Egypt, who had remained a minority there, and by the whole Ismaili community of Yaman, then dependent on the Fatimid regime. Having been a subsidiary community of Yaman, the Ismailis of Gujarat in western India, too, now acknowledged al-Mustaʿli as their new imam. These Ismailis, who later traced the imamate in al-Mustaʿli's progeny, became known as Mustaʿliyya or Mustaʿlawiyya and they maintained their relations with the *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo, which henceforth served as the headquarters of Mustaʿli Ismailism.

The situation was drastically different in the eastern lands throughout the Saljuq dominions, where the Fatimids no longer exercised any political influence. By 487/1094, Hasan-i Sabbah had emerged as the undisputed leader of the Persian Ismailis and, indeed, of all the Ismailis of the Saljuq realm. Nothing is known about the final years of Ibn ʿAttash, who seems to have been gradually eclipsed by Hasan-i Sabbah. At any rate, the responsibility in Persia and in the wider Saljuq domains for taking sides in the Nizari-Mustaʿli conflict now rested with Hasan-i Sabbah. He had been following an independent policy already for several years, and now he showed no hesitation in supporting Nizar's cause and severing his ties with the Fatimid regime and the *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo, which had transferred their own

allegiance to al-Mustaʿli. In this decision, Hasan was supported by the entire Persian Ismaili community without any dissenting voice. This is another testimony to Hasan's successful leadership of the Persian Ismailis, who remained united in their opposition to the Saljuqs. In fact, the Persian Ismailis continued to amaze the quarrelling Saljuqs and the Sunni establishment by their unwavering unity and sense of loyalty, in spite of repeated military assaults on their strongholds.

Hasan's decision not to endorse the developments in Fatimid Egypt and the imamate of al-Mustaʿli was also supported by the Ismailis of Iraq. These Ismailis, upholding al-Mustansir's announced *nass* in favour of Nizar, now recognized the latter as his father's successor to the imamate and became designated as the Nizariyya, a term rarely used by the Nizaris themselves. But the original reaction of the Ismailis of Syria to this schism remains unclear. Both factions seem to have been initially present in Syria, where the overall size of the Ismaili community must have been rather small at that time. As a former Fatimid dominion, however, the bulk of the Syrian Ismailis initially seem to have recognized al-Mustaʿli's imamate. It was not until the 510s/1120s that, due to the success of the Persian *daʿi*s sent from Alamut, the Syrian Mustaʿlians began to be rapidly overshadowed by an expanding Nizari community which later became the sole Ismaili community in Syria.

The Nizari Ismailis, who had acknowledged Nizar as their new imam after al-Mustansir, soon faced a major difficulty revolving around Nizar's successor to the imamate. Nizar, as noted, had claimed the imamate during his rising. But he was executed about a year after his father's death, and now the nascent Nizariyya wondered about the identity of their imam after Nizar. Matters must have been particularly complicated as no Nizarid Fatimid seems to have laid an open claim to the imamate on Nizar's death.

It is a historical fact that Nizar did have male progeny. The sources mention the names of at least two of his sons: Abu ʿAbd Allah al-Husayn and Abu ʿAli al-Hasan. It is also known that a line of Nizarids, descendants of Nizar's sons, continued to live in the Maghrib and Egypt until the late Fatimid times. Some of these Nizarids were pretenders to the Fatimid caliphate, and they may also have claimed the Nizari imamate. For instance, Abu ʿAbd Allah al-Husayn himself

launched an abortive revolt against the Fatimid caliph al-Hafiz from his base in the Maghrib, but he was captured and executed in 526/1131.[25] The sources relate another abortive attempt, in 543/1148, by a descendant of Nizar to seize power in Cairo.[26] This Nizarid, whose name has not been preserved, was also based in the Maghrib where he had received considerable support from the Kutama and other Berbers. The last known attempt by the Nizarids based in the Maghrib to overthrow the Fatimid dynasty occurred in the reign of al-ʿAdid (555–567/1160–1171), the last Fatimid caliph.[27] In 556/1161, Muhammad b. al-Husayn b. Nizar, a grandson of Nizar, came to Barqa from his base in the Maghrib. Aiming to seize Cairo, he rose in revolt with much support and adopted the caliphal title of al-Muntasir bi'llah. He was however betrayed by one of his chief allies who had him arrested and sent to Cairo where he was executed.

In the meantime, Nizar's successor had not been named at Alamut by Hasan-i Sabbah. It is possible that the eastern Ismailis may not have been informed in time of Nizar's tragic fate in Cairo and that they continued to await his reappearance for some time. The matter remains obscure, especially since no Nizari sources have been recovered from that early period. However, published numismatic evidence reveals that Nizar's name and caliphal title had continued to be mentioned on the coins struck at Kursi al-Daylam, viz., Alamut, for some seventy years after his death until the time of Muhammad b. Buzurg-Ummid (532–557/1138–1162), Hasan-i Sabbah's second successor at Alamut. The latest known specimens of such coins, dinars minted at Alamut in 553/1158 and 556/1161, bear the legends *ʿAli wali Allah/al-Mustafa li-Din Allah, Nizar*, blessing Nizar's progeny anonymously.[28]

Be that as it may, the Nizariyya were now left without an accessible imam. The Ismailis had once before, during the pre-Fatimid period of their history, experienced a similar situation when their imams were hidden from the eyes of their followers. Drawing on that earlier antecedent, the Nizaris, too, were now experiencing a *dawr al-satr*, or period of concealment, when the imams would not be directly accessible to their followers. According to later Nizari traditions and as reported by our Persian historians, already in Hasan-i Sabbah's time many Nizaris had come to hold the view that a son or grandson

of Nizar had in fact been brought secretly from Egypt to Persia, and this Nizarid became the progenitor of the line of the Nizari imams who emerged later at Alamut.[29] This Nizari tradition must have had wide currency by the final years of Hasan-i Sabbah's life as it is corroborated by an anti-Nizari polemical epistle issued by the Fatimid chancery in 516/1112. In this epistle, sent to the Musta'lian community in Syria, the Fatimid caliph al-Amir (495–524/1101–1130) ridicules the idea that a descendant of Nizar was then living somewhere in Persia.[30] That in the absence of a manifest imam, Hasan himself continued to be obeyed as the supreme leader of the Nizari community without any challenges to his authority is yet another testimony to his leadership qualities.

It seems that not long after the schism of 487/1094, Hasan was recognized also as the *hujja* of the inaccessible imam, reminiscent of another pre-Fatimid Ismaili tradition. It may be recalled that the central leaders of the early, pre-Fatimid Ismailis, too, had been regarded at least until 286/899 as the *hujja*s of the concealed imam whose reappearance was eagerly awaited. On the basis of this tradition, it was held that in the time of the imam's concealment his *hujja* would be his chief representative in the community. And Hasan-i Sabbah acted as the imam's *hujja* until such time as the imam himself would appear and take charge of the leadership of his community.[31]

It was under such circumstances that the outsiders from early on acquired the distinct impression that the movement of the Persian (Nizari) Ismailis reflected a new teaching, which they designated as the 'new preaching' (*al-da'wa al-jadida*) in contradistinction to the 'old preaching' (*al-da'wa al-qadima*) of the Fatimid Ismailis maintained by the Musta'lian Ismailis.[32] The 'new preaching' did not, however, represent any new set of doctrines; it was essentially the reformulation, in a more rigorous manner, of an old Shi'i doctrine of long-standing among the Ismailis: the doctrine of *ta'lim*, or authoritative teaching of the imam. This doctrine was now restated by Hasan in a Persian treatise entitled *Chahar fasl* (Arabic, *al-Fusul al-arba'a*), or *The Four Chapters*, which has not survived; but the treatise was seen and quoted by our Persian historians,[33] as well as by Hasan's contemporary al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153), who may have been a crypto-Ismaili himself. Extensive extracts of this treatise have

been preserved by al-Shahrastani in his Arabic heresiographical work written around 521/1127, a few years after Hasan's death.[34] In a series of four propositions Hasan established the inadequacy of human reason in knowing God and argued for the necessity of an authoritative teacher (*muʿallim-i sadiq*) for the spiritual guidance of men; a teacher who would be none other than the Ismaili imam of the time. The doctrine of *taʿlim*, emphasizing the autonomous teaching authority of each imam in his time, became the central doctrine of the early Nizaris who now became known to outsiders also as the Taʿlimiyya. The doctrine, thus, stressed loyalty to the imam, and to his full representative who was then leading the community; it also provided the foundation for all the subsequent Nizari teachings of the Alamut period.

Ismaili fortunes were continuously rising in Persia during Barkiyaruq's reign. In addition to seizing strongholds and consolidating their position in Rudbar, Qumis and Quhistan, the Ismailis were now directing their attention closer to the seat of Saljuq power, Isfahan. In this area, the Ismailis, through the efforts of Ahmad b. ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAttash, attained a major political success by gaining possession of the fortress of Shahdiz in 494/1100. Shahdiz, situated about eight kilometres south of Isfahan, had been rebuilt by Malik Shah as a key fortress guarding the routes to the main Saljuq capital. Soon afterwards, Barkiyaruq in western Persia and Sanjar in Khurasan agreed to check, in their respective territories, the rising power of the Ismailis. Despite the Saljuq offensives, however, the Ismailis held to their strongholds in Persia.

By the time of Barkiyaruq's death in 498/1105, Hasan-i Sabbah had extended his activities also to Syria, reflecting wider Ismaili ambitions.[35] A number of Persian *daʿi*s now arrived in northern Syria, where they concentrated their efforts in Aleppo and in the towns of the Jazr region. As in Persia, Saljuq rule in Syria had caused many problems and was detested by the Syrians who were divided among themselves and unable to repel the Turks. Aiming to organize and lead the small Syrian Nizari community and win new converts from other Muslim communities in Syria, the Persian *daʿi*s who were despatched from Alamut used the same methods of struggle as had been adopted in Persia. Although Hasan-i Sabbah did

manage to establish a subsidiary community in Syria, almost half a century of uninterrupted efforts were required before the Nizari Ismailis could finally acquire a network of mountain strongholds in central Syria.

With the accession of Muhammad Tapar (498–511/1105–1118) to the Saljuq sultanate, marking the end of the dynastic disputes among the Saljuqs, a new phase was initiated in the Saljuq-Ismaili relations. Barkiyaruq and Sanjar had already checked what could have been a Nizari sweep through the Saljuq dominions in Persia, but the Nizaris had managed to maintain or even strengthen their local positions in several territories. Muhammad Tapar now set out to deal with the Nizaris more firmly. During his reign, the Nizaris lost most of their strongholds in the Zagros mountains as well as in Iraq; they were also driven out of northern Syria. But Muhammad Tapar's chief anti-Nizari campaign, led by the sultan himself, was directed against Shahdiz.[36] With the fall of Shahdiz in 500/1107, the Nizaris lost their influence in the Isfahan region as well.

Sultan Muhammad Tapar from early on had also concerned himself with the main centre of Nizari power in Rudbar, especially Alamut where Hasan-i Sabbah was staying. After several preliminary campaigns in the region, the reduction of Alamut was entrusted in 503/1109 to Anushtegin Shirgir, the governor of Sawa. For eight consecutive years, according to our Persian historians, Shirgir besieged Alamut and Lamasar, destroying the crops of Rudbar and engaging in sporadic battles with the Nizaris.[37] The Ismaili resistance during this period continued to amaze Shirgir, who received regular reinforcements from other Saljuq amirs. Despite their much superior military power and a prolonged war of attrition, the Saljuqs failed to take Alamut by force, and on receiving the news of Muhammad Tapar's death in 511/1118 they broke camp hurriedly and left Rudbar. Hasan-i Sabbah thus emerged victorious from a dangerous situation which could have resulted in his irrevocable defeat.

On Muhammad Tapar's death, the Saljuq sultanate entered into another period of internal strife, providing yet another timely respite for the Nizari Ismailis to recover from some of the defeats they had suffered previously. But for all intents and purposes, the Nizari struggle against the Saljuqs had now lost its momentum, much in

the same way that the Saljuq offensive of Muhammad Tapar's time against the Nizaris had failed to achieve its targets. In Hodgson's words,[38] the Saljuq-Ismaili relations had now entered a new phase of 'stalemate'. For almost three decades since the seizure of Alamut, the Nizari Ismailis had attempted to undermine the Saljuqs throughout their dominions. For a while, they had even posed a serious threat to the seat of Saljuq power in Isfahan itself. Meanwhile, the Nizaris themselves had suffered serious setbacks. Not only did the Saljuqs regularly check the growth of their power in various localities, but their partisans in the cities were continuously massacred. Hasan-i Sabbah could no longer challenge the Saljuqs from the mountain bases which remained in Nizari hands, as he had done before. However, his struggle had resulted in regional successes, enabling the Nizari Ismailis of Persia to hold on to important territories in Rudbar, Qumis and Quhistan, with their numerous fortresses, villages and towns.

Hasan-i Sabbah maintained his own dedication to the Nizari *da'wa* and state to the very end, never weakening in his resolve or despairing in the face of massacres and military defeats suffered by his partisans. His last act of wisdom unfolded in the careful manner in which he handed down the leadership of the Nizari Ismaili community. Feeling the end of his days, Hasan summoned his lieutenant at Lamasar, Kiya Buzurg-Ummid, and designated him as head of the Nizari community and state. Buzurg-Ummid was, however, enjoined to rule in consultation with three dignitaries, who had different fields of expertise, until such time as the imam himself would appear. Hasan-i Sabbah died at Alamut, after a brief illness, towards the end of Rabi' II 518/middle of June 1124; he was buried near the fortress of Alamut and his mausoleum was regularly visited by the Nizaris until it was destroyed by the Mongol hordes in 654/1256.

Notes

* A longer version of this chapter originally appeared as 'Hasan-i Sabbah and the Origins of the Nizari Isma'ili Movement', in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 181–204.

1. See Nizam al-Mulk, *Siyar al-muluk* (*Siyasat-nama*), ed. H. Darke (2nd ed., Tehran, 1347 Sh./ 1968), pp. 289–295, 297–305; English trans., *The Book of Government; or, Rules for Kings*, tr. H. Darke (2nd ed., London, 1978), pp. 208–218, 220–226. See also S.M. Stern, 'The Early Isma'ili Missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurasan and Transoxania', *BSOAS*, 23 (1960), pp. 56–90; reprinted in his *Studies in Early Isma'ilism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983), pp. 189–233, and F. Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 120 ff.

2. On the causes of this schism and its implications, see W. Madelung, 'Das Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre', *Der Islam*, 37 (1961), pp. 65–86; F. Daftary, 'A Major Schism in the Early Isma'ili Movement', *Studia Islamica*, 77 (1993), pp. 123–139, and his *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 125–134, 611–612.

3. For further details, see B. Spuler, *Iran in früh-islamischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1952), pp. 225 ff.; J. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. K. Jahn (Dordrecht, 1968), pp. 126–171; S.M. Stern, 'Ya'qub the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment', in C.E. Bosworth, ed., *Iran and Islam, in Memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky* (Edinburgh, 1971), pp. 535–555; C.E. Bosworth, 'The Interaction of Arabic and Persian Literature and Culture in the 10th and Early 11th Centuries', *al-Abhath*, 27 (1978–79), pp. 59–75; reprinted in his *Medieval Arabic Culture and Administration* (London, 1982), article VIII, and his *The History of the Saffarids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz (247/861 to 949/1542–3)* (Costa Mesa, CA, and New York, 1994), pp. 168–180. For an excellent discussion of the resurgence of the Persian 'national' consciousness under the Buyids, see W. Madelung, 'The Assumption of the Title Shahanshah by the Buyids and the Reign of the Daylam (*Dawlat al-Daylam*)', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 28 (1969), pp. 84–108, 168–183; reprinted in his *Religious and Ethnic Movements in Medieval Islam* (London, 1992), article VIII. See also V. Minorsky, *La domination des Dailamites* (Paris, 1932), pp. 1–26.

4. See, for instance, Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi'l-ta'rikh*, ed. C.J. Tornberg (Leiden, 1851–76), vol. 9, pp. 266–273, 311–312, 321 ff., 358, 384–385, and elsewhere.

5. For further details, see F. Daftary, 'Persian Historiography of the Early Nizari Isma'ilis', *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 30 (1992), pp. 91–97.

6. Two short manuscripts (Persian 162, and Persian 177), each one entitled *Sargudhasht-i Sayyidna* are among the Persian Ismaili manuscripts of The Institute of Ismaili Studies Library, London. These manuscripts, transcribed in India at the beginning of the twentieth century, are late compilations based on unknown sources. They contain an admixture of highly anachronistic details,

such as Hasan-i Sabbah's meeting with Nasir-i Khusraw in Cairo, the tale of the three schoolfellows, etc., as well as some of the events reported by our Persian historians in their extracts from the original *Sargudhasht-i Sayyidna*.

7. ʿAlaʾ al-Din ʿAta-Malik Juwayni, *Taʾrikh-i jahan-gusha*, ed. M. Qazwini (Leiden and London, 1912–1937), vol. 3, pp. 186–216; English trans., *The History of the World-Conqueror*, tr. J.A. Boyle (Manchester, 1958), vol. 2, pp. 666–683; Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah, *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh*: *qismat Ismaʿiliyan va Fatimiyan va Nizariyan va daʿiyan va rafiqan*, ed. M.T. Danishpazhuh and M. Mudarrisi Zanjani (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), pp. 97–137; Abu'l-Qasim ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAli Kashani, *Zubdat al-tawarikh: bakhsh-i Fatimiyan va Nizariyan*, ed. M.T. Danishpazhuh (2nd ed., Tehran, 1366 Sh./ 1987), pp. 133–172. Briefer biographical details on Hasan, from a different source, are related in Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil*, vol. 10, pp. 216, 217, 369–370. In modern times, a few popular accounts of Hasan-i Sabbah have been produced, including those by Jawad Muscati, ʿArif Tamir, and Mustafa Ghalib. Karim Kishavarz's *Hasan-i Sabbah* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1965) is a semi-popular but documented biography. For brief scholarly accounts of Hasan-i Sabbah and his career, see Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* (The Hague, 1955), pp. 41–98, and his 'The Ismaʿili State', in *The Cambridge History of Iran:* Volume 5, *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 424–449; B. Lewis, *The Assassins* (London, 1967), pp. 38–63, 145–148, and Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis*, pp. 324–371, 669–681. The relevant studies of Russian scholars generally suffer from excessive Marxist biases; see, for instance, Lyudmila V. Stroeva's *Gosudarstvo ismailitov v Irane v XI-XIII vv*. (Moscow, 1978); Persian trans., *Taʾrikh-i Ismaʿiliyan dar Iran*, tr. P. Munzavi (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992).

8. ʿAbd Allah b. Lutf Allah al-Bihdadini, Hafiz-i Abru, *Majmaʿ al-tawarikh al-sultaniyya: qismat-i khulafaʾ-i ʿAlawiyya-yi Maghrib va Misr va Nizariyan va rafiqan*, ed. M. Mudarrisi Zanjani (Tehran, 1364 Sh./1985), pp. 191–225.

9. Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil*, vol. 10, pp. 161–162. See also Rashid al-Din, p. 77; Kashani, p. 114, and Taqi al-Din Ahmad b. ʿAli al-Maqrizi, *Ittiʿaz al-hunafaʾ bi-akhbar al-aʾimma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafaʾ*, ed. Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal and M. Hilmi M. Ahmad (Cairo, 1967–73), vol. 2, p. 323, and vol. 3, p. 15.

10. On the castle of Alamut and its environs, see F. Stark, *The Valleys of the Assassins* (London, 1934), pp. 197–233; W. Ivanow, *Alamut and Lamasar: Two Mediaeval Ismaili Strongholds in Iran* (Tehran, 1960), pp. 1–11, 30–59; P. Willey, *The Castles of the Assassins* (London, 1963), pp. 204–226; M. Sutuda, *Qilaʿ-i Ismaʿiliyya* (Tehran, 1345 Sh./1966), pp. 72–108, and B. Hourcade, 'Alamut', *EIR*, vol. 1, pp. 797–801.

11. Hodgson, 'Ismaʿili State', p. 429.

12. Rashid al-Din, pp. 133–134. See also Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 215–216; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, p. 683, and Kashani, p. 168.

13. Rashid al-Din, p. 112, and Kashani, p. 148.

14. *Haft bab-i Baba Sayyidna*, ed. W. Ivanow, in his *Two Early Ismaili Treatises* (Bombay, 1933), p. 30; English trans., in Hodgson, *Order*, p. 314.

15. See Rashid al-Din, pp. 149–153; Kashani, pp. 186–190, and Madelung, *Religious Trends*, pp. 9–12.

16. See Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 207–208; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 678–679; Rashid al-Din, pp. 116–120, and Kashani, pp. 151–155.

17. Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 208–209; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, p. 679; Rashid al-Din, pp. 115–116, and Kashani, pp. 150–151. Juwayni places the seizure of Lamasar in 495/1102, which seems to be incorrect. See also Ivanow, *Alamut and Lamasar*, pp. 60–74; Willey, *Castles of the Assassins*, pp. 269–279; Sutuda, *Qila'*, pp. 54–71, and C.E. Bosworth, 'Lanbasar', *EI2*, vol. 5, p. 656.

18. Our discussion here owes much to the pioneering ideas of Marshall Hodgson, who produced the first comprehensive and scholarly history of the Nizari Ismailis of the Alamut period; see especially his *Order*, pp. 77–84, 87–89, 110–120; 'Isma'ili State', pp. 439–443, and his monumental *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago, 1974), vol. 2, pp. 58–60.

19. See W. Ivanow, 'An Ismaili Poem in Praise of Fidawis', *JBBRAS*, NS, 14 (1938), pp. 63–72.

20. For the list of some forty-eight such missions conducted in Hasan-i Sabbah's time, see Rashid al-Din, pp. 134–137, and Kashani, pp. 169–172.

21. For further details on the early formation of these tales, rooted in ignorance and imaginative fantasies, see F. Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis* (London, 1994), especially pp. 88–127.

22. See, for instance, Zahir al-Din Nishapuri, *Saljuq-nama,* ed. I. Afshar (Tehran, 1332 Sh./1953), pp. 40–41; Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Rawandi, *Rahat al-sudur*, ed. M. Iqbal (London, 1921), pp. 157–158, and Hamd Allah Mustawfi Qazwini, *Ta'rikh-i guzida*, ed. 'Abd al-Husayn Nava'i (Tehran, 1339 Sh./ 1960), pp. 445–446.

23. On al-Mustansir's succession dispute and the rising of Nizar, see Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 179–181; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 661–663; Rashid al-Din, pp. 77–79; Kashani, pp. 114–115; Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Dhayl ta'rikh Dimashq*, ed. H.F. Amedroz (Leiden, 1908), p. 128; ed. S. Zakkar (Damascus, 1983), pp. 210–211; Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbar Misr*, ed. A. Fu'ad Sayyid (Cairo, 1981), pp. 59–63; Ibn Zafir, *Akhbar al-duwal al-munqati'a*, ed. A. Ferré (Cairo, 1972), pp. 83–85; al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, vol. 3, pp. 11–16, 27; Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujum al-zahira*

fi muluk Misr wa'l-Qahira (Cairo, 1348–92/1929–72), vol. 5, pp. 142–145; Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil*, vol. 10, pp. 161–162, and H.A.R. Gibb 'Nizar b. al-Mustansir', *EI2*, vol. 8, p. 83.

24. See Sotheby's *Coins, together with Historical Medals and Banknotes*, Catalogue LN 4229 'Nizar' (London, 1994), pp. 36–37.

25. Ibn Zafir, *Akhbar*, p. 97, naming this Nizarid as Abu 'Abd Allah al-Hasan b. Nizar, and al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, vol. 3, p. 147.

26. Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Dhayl*, ed. Amedroz, p. 302; ed. Zakkar, pp. 469–470; lbn Muyassar, *Akhbar*, p. 139; al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, vol. 3, p. 186, and Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujum*, vol. 5, p. 282. The anonymous *Bustan al-jami'*, ed. Claude Cahen, in his 'Une chronique Syrienne du VIe/XIIe siècle: *Le Bustan al-Jami'*', *Bulletin d'Études Orientales*, 7–8 (1937–38), p. 127, places this revolt in the year 540/1145–46.

27. Ibn Zafir, *Akhbar*, p. 111; al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, vol. 3, p. 246, and Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujum*, vol. 5, p. 339.

28. See P. Casanova, 'Monnaie des Assassins de Perse', *Revue Numismatique*, 3 série, 11 (1893), pp. 343–352; George C. Miles, 'Coins of the Assassins of Alamut', *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, 3 (1972), pp. 155–162, and *Centuries of Gold: The Coinage of Medieval Islam*, Islamic Coins at the Zamana Gallery (London, 1986), p. 46, no. 134.

29. See Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 180–181, 231–237; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 663, 691–695; Rashid al-Din, pp. 79, 166–168, and Kashani, pp. 115, 202–204. See also lbn al-Qalanisi, *Dhayl*, ed. Amedroz, pp. 127–129, citing a passage from the *Ta'rikh* of Ibn al-Azraq al-Fariqi; Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbar*, p. 102; Hodgson, *Order*, pp. 160–162, and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 350, 395–392.

30. Al-Amir bi-Ahkam Allah, *al-Hidaya al-Amiriyya*, ed. A.A.A. Fyzee (Bombay, etc., 1938), pp. 23–24; reprinted in *Majmu'at al-watha'iq al-Fatimiyya*, ed. Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal (Cairo, 1958), pp. 226–227. This epistle and the circumstances surrounding its issue, representing the first official Musta'lian attempt to refute the claims of Nizar and his descendants to the imamate, is fully analysed in S.M. Stern, 'The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir (al-Hidaya al-Amiriyya) – its Date and its Purpose', *JRAS* (1950), pp. 20–31; reprinted in S.M. Stern, *History and Culture in the Medieval Muslim World* (London, 1984), article X. See also Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbar*, pp. 99–101, 103, and al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, vol. 3, pp. 84–87.

31. See *Haft bab*, p. 21; tr. Hodgson, in his *Order*, p. 301; this is the earliest extant Nizari work, written anonymously around 596/1200. In later Nizari sources, too, Hasan-i Sabbah is given the title of *hujja*; see, for instance, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Rawdat al-taslim*, ed. and tr. W. Ivanow (Leiden, 1950), text p.

148; Abu Ishaq Quhistani, *Haft bab*, ed. and tr. W. Ivanow (Bombay, 1959), text pp. 23, 43, translation pp. 23, 43, and Khayrkhwah-i Harati, *Tasnifat*, ed. W. Ivanow (Tehran, 1961), pp. 52, 102.

32. See, for instance, Abu'l-Fath Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-milal wa'l-nihal*, ed. W. Cureton (London, 1842–46), pp. 147–150; partial English trans., *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, tr. A.K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn (London, 1984), pp. 165, 167; Juwayni, vol. 3, p. 195; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, p. 671; Rashid al-Din, p. 105, and Kashani, p. 142.

33. Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 195–199; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 671–673; Rashid al-Din, pp. 105–107, and Kashani, pp. 142–143.

34. Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal*, pp. 150–152; tr. Kazi and Flynn, pp. 167–170, also translated into English by Hodgson, in his *Order*, pp. 325–328; French trans., *Livre des religions et des sectes*, tr. D. Gimaret et al. (Paris, 1986–93), vol. 1, pp. 560–565. See also Hodgson, *Order*, pp. 51–61, his 'Ismaʿili State', pp. 433–437, and Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis*, pp. 367 ff.

35. See B. Lewis, 'The Ismaʿilites and the Assassins', in K.M. Setton, ed., *A History of the Crusades*: Volume I, *The First Hundred Years*, ed. M.W. Baldwin (2nd ed., Madison, WI, 1969), pp. 99–114, and his *The Assassins*, pp. 97–104.

36. See Rashid al-Din, pp. 120–122, and his *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh: ta'rikh-i al-i Saljuq*, ed. A. Ateş (Ankara, 1960), pp. 69–74; Kashani, pp. 156–157; Zahir al-Din Nishapuri, *Saljuq-nama*, pp. 41–42; al-Rawandi, *Rahat al-sudur*, pp. 155–161; Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil*, vol. 10, pp. 299–302, and Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Dhayl*, ed. Amedroz, pp. 151–156; ed. Zakkar, pp. 244–250. See also Caro O. Minasian, *Shah Diz of Ismaʿili Fame, its Siege and Destruction* (London, 1971).

37. Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 211–213; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 680–681; Rashid al-Din, pp. 124–132, and Kashani, pp. 160–167.

38. Hodgson, *Order*, pp. 99 ff., 145–146, and his 'Ismaʿili State', pp. 447–448.

8

The Syrian Ismailis and the Crusaders: History and Myth

By the time of the Nizari-Mustaʿli crisis in 1094, the Ismailis of Persia were under the overall leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 1124), a remarkable Ismaili *daʿi* who was already following an independent revolutionary policy against the Saljuq Turks, the new champions of Sunni Islam and the virtual masters of the Abbasid caliphate.* A few years earlier, in 1090, Hasan had seized the mountain fortress of Alamut in northern Persia, signalling the foundation of what was to become known as the Nizari Ismaili state, with its territories and networks of mountain fortresses in different parts of Persia and Syria. In the Nizari-Mustaʿli conflict, Hasan sided with Nizar and severed his relations with Fatimid Cairo. This decision, in fact, led to the establishment of the Nizari *daʿwa,* independent of the Fatimid regime. Henceforth, Alamut served as the headquarters of the Nizari Ismaili *daʿwa* and state. It may be noted at this juncture that the Nizari *daʿwa* and state were initially led by Hasan-i Sabbah and his next two successors at Alamut acting as *daʿi*s and chief representatives of imams, who remained concealed and inaccessible. But from 1164, the Nizari imams themselves, tracing their genealogy to Nizar b. al-Mustansir (d. 1095), emerged openly at Alamut taking charge of the affairs of their community and state. The Nizari state in Persia experienced numerous political vicissitudes and eventually collapsed only under the onslaught of the all- conquering Mongol hordes in 1256.[1]

The revolt of the Persian Ismailis soon acquired a distinctive pattern, adapted to the vastly superior military power of the Saljuqs and the decentralized nature of their rule, which was distributed locally

among numerous amirs. Under such circumstances, Hasan-i Sabbah designed a strategy to overwhelm the Saljuqs locality by locality, and from a multitude of impregnable strongholds. Hasan's adoption of assassination as an auxiliary technique for achieving military and political objectives, too, was a response to the decentralized pattern of Saljuq power. This technique had been used earlier by a variety of Muslim groups, while the contemporary Saljuqs as well as the Crusaders themselves killed their enemies. Likewise, Hasan did assign a limited and measured role within his overall military strategy to the selective removal of prominent adversaries; but soon almost every assassination of any religious, political or military significance in the central lands of Islam was attributed to the Nizari Ismailis.

The actual Ismaili missions were carried out by the so-called *fida'i*s (or *fidawi*s), devotees who volunteered for such self-sacrificing assignments. The missions, normally conducted in public places, were daring acts with intimidating effects. Contrary to the claims of occidental chroniclers of the Crusades and later European sources, the *fida'i*s do not seem to have received elaborate training in various subjects. Nor is there any evidence suggesting that hashish or any other narcotic product was ever administered to the *fida'i*s to motivate or condition them for performing their tasks. Indeed, the available evidence indicates that the *fida'i*s were highly alert and sober individuals who often waited for long periods before they could find a suitable opportunity to accomplish their mission. They were volunteers who sacrificed their lives in the service of their religion and community. The assassinations, whatever their real source, triggered massacres of all suspected Ismailis in a particular locality, which in turn provoked retaliatory measures.

From the initial years of the 12th century, or perhaps even a few years earlier, Hasan-i Sabbah despatched *da'i*s to Syria to organize and lead the Nizari Ismailis there. The political fragmentation of Syria and the region's diversified religious topography, including the existence of Ismaili groups, favoured the spread of the Nizari Ismaili *da'wa*. From early on, the Persian emissaries who were sent from Alamut to Syria used more or less the same tactics and methods of struggle as those adopted in Persia. Accordingly, they attempted to seize strategic strongholds which could be used as bases of military

operations, also resorting to activist policies. In Syria, however, the *daʿi*s found their task more formidable; they had to struggle for almost half a century before they finally managed to acquire a network of permanent strongholds in central Syria. The initiation of Nizari Ismaili activities in Syria, in fact, coincided with the arrival of the Crusaders in the region, an important event which accentuated the political fragmentation of Syria and added to local conflicts.

The Crusading movement for fighting the enemies of Christendom in the East, as is known, was launched in Europe in 1095 in response to an appeal made by Pope Urban II. The Europeans had already for some time deemed it undesirable that the sacred places of Christendom in Palestine, especially Jerusalem itself, should be under Muslim control. At any rate, a new era in Christian-Muslim relations was to commence in the form of numerous Crusades to the Holy Land, where the Crusaders were to acquire permanent bases for some two centuries. The Christian pilgrim-soldiers of the First Crusade were already in Syria by 1097, and by July 1099 they had defeated the local Fatimid garrison and entered Jerusalem, their primary destination. The swift victory of the First Crusade was in no small measure due to political decline and disunity in the Muslim camp. The Crusaders established four small states in the conquered territories of the Near East, a region that became known to them as Outremer, or the 'land beyond the sea'. These Frankish states were based in Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli and Jerusalem. The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem naturally enjoyed supremacy among the Frankish states.

From early on, the Syrian Nizari Ismailis came into contact and conflict with the Crusaders. They also had extended encounters with the Hospitallers and the Templars, the military orders founded in 1113 and 1119 respectively. The military orders, which acted rather autonomously, provided military assistance to the Crusaders in the Frankish states in addition to guarding the pilgrim routes to the Holy Land, their primary duty. The military orders acquired numerous castles in Syria in the neighbourhood of those later seized by the Nizari Ismailis. In fact, the Nizari Ismailis represented the first Shiʿi Muslim community with whom the Crusaders had established contacts. The complex and vacillating Ismaili-Crusader relations continued almost without interruption until the middle of the 13th century, but these

relations did not improve the Crusaders' knowledge of the Ismailis as indeed the Franks' proximity to the Muslims in general did not lead to their better understanding of Islam.

Initially, the Syrian Ismailis operated from their base in Aleppo, where they had temporarily found a protector in the city's Saljuq ruler, Ridwan. In 1106, they seized Apamea, a fortified outpost of Aleppo, probably with the encouragement of Ridwan. However, the Nizari Ismailis failed to retain Apamea as their first stronghold in Syria. Soon afterward, Tancred, the regent of Antioch who had already occupied the surrounding districts, besieged Apamea and forced its surrender. The Ismaili *daʿi*, a certain Abu Tahir, and his associates, managed to return to Aleppo only after paying a ransom to Tancred. This was probably the first encounter between the Ismailis and the Crusaders. With the death of Ridwan in 1113, the Nizari fortunes were rapidly reversed in northern Syria. The new Saljuq ruler of Aleppo authorized the persecution of the Ismailis in his domain, and those who survived the Saljuq massacres secretly sought refuge in adjacent districts, including the Frankish territories.[2] In the second phase of their activities in Syria, after their debacle in Aleppo, the Ismailis moved the centre of their operations to Damascus in the south. By 1125, they had recovered sufficiently under the leadership of another Persian *daʿi*, Bahram, to send an armed contingent to join the forces of the region's Burid ruler and fight against the encroaching Franks. Bahram demanded and was given by the Burids the fortress of Baniyas, on the border of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Bahram fortified Baniyas and used it as his base of operations, despatching subordinate *daʿi*s to adjacent districts and winning numerous converts. The Ismaili success in southern Syria too proved short-lived. In 1128, Bahram was killed in a local battle, and the Ismailis' Burid protector in Damascus died in the same year. In the following year, a new Burid ruler of Damascus sanctioned a general massacre of the Ismailis; some 6,000 Ismailis were murdered by the town militia and the mob, supported by the predominantly Sunni inhabitants of Damascus. In the wake of this catastrophe, the leader of the Syrian Ismailis wrote to King Baldwin II of Jerusalem (1118–1131), who was then planning to advance on Damascus, and offered to cede Baniyas to the Franks in exchange for receiving asylum.[3] In the event, the *daʿi*,

with some of his associates, did find refuge in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Soon after, the ruler of Damascus who had persecuted the Ismailis was killed by two *fida'i*s, but the Nizari Ismailis never recovered their position in southern Syria. Henceforth, the Syrian Ismailis shifted their activities away from cities – a policy that eventually proved fruitful. Meanwhile, the Fatimids had their own military encounters with the Crusaders, and by 1153, the Fatimids had lost Ascalon, their last outpost in the Levant, to the Franks.

It was only during the third phase of their early history, lasting some two decades after their debacle of 1129 in Damascus, that the Syrian Ismailis finally succeeded in acquiring a network of strongholds in Jabal Bahra (modern Jabal Ansariyya), situated between Hama and the Mediterranean coastline. The Crusaders had earlier attempted in vain to establish themselves in the same mountainous region. In 1133, the Ismailis purchased their first fortress, Qadmus, from a local Muslim ruler who had recovered the place from the Franks only a year earlier. Soon after, they purchased Kahf, which became one of their chief strongholds. In 1137, the Frankish garrison stationed at the fortress of Khariba was dislodged by the local Ismailis. In 1140, the Ismailis captured Masyaf, their most important castle in Syria, which normally served as the headquarters of their chief *da'i*. Around the same time, they seized several other fortresses in the southern part of Jabal Bahra, in proximity to the Frankish territories of Antioch and Tripoli. William of Tyre (d. ca. 1184), the earliest of the occidental chroniclers of the Crusades to have written about the Syrian Ismailis, puts the number of these fortresses at ten and the total Ismaili population of the region at 60,000.[4] Henceforth, the Nizari Ismailis had intermittent military entanglements in this region with the Franks and their military orders.

The Nizari Ismailis had now finally acquired permanent bases in Syria, and they began to consolidate their position despite the continuous enmity of the surrounding Sunni rulers and the threats of the Crusaders, who were active in the adjacent Latin states of Antioch and Tripoli. Always interested in securing their independence, however, the Syrian Ismailis acted pragmatically in their external relations, and occasionally allied themselves with the Franks when they were menaced by their even more powerful Sunni enemies. In

1149, when the Ismaili fortresses were threatened by Nur al-Din, the ardently anti-Shi'i Zangid ruler of Syria, they joined forces with Raymond of Antioch in a campaign against the Zangids.[5] The Ismaili commander and Raymond, who had been equally threatened by the territorial designs of the Zangids, both lost their lives in the battlefield at 'Inab. A few years later, in 1152, however, a band of *fida'i*s are alleged to have killed Count Raymond II of Tripoli together with several knights in front of the gates of his city.[6] The motives for the assassination of Raymond II were never revealed. At any rate, the Franks now massacred many Muslims in revenge. At the same time, the Templar knights raided the Ismaili castles of Jabal Bahra and forced the Ismailis to start paying an annual tribute of 2,000 gold pieces to their military order.

In the early 1160s, the Syrian Nizari Ismailis entered a new phase of their history coinciding with the career of Rashid al-Din Sinan (d. 1193), their greatest leader and the original 'Old Man of the Mountain' of the Crusaders. Sinan, who had spent some time at Alamut furthering his Ismaili education, was appointed to lead the Syrian Ismaili community by Hasan II (1162–1166), the first Nizari imam to have emerged at Alamut. Sinan systematically consolidated the position of his community while entering into an intricate web of shifting alliances with the neighbouring Muslim rulers as well as the Crusaders. Always aiming to guarantee the security of his community, Sinan fortified or rebuilt the Ismaili strongholds in Syria; he also seized the fortress of 'Ullayqa, near the castle of Marqab held by the Hospitallers.[7]

In Sinan's time, Nur al-Din and Salah al-Din, who ended Fatimid rule and led the Muslim war against the Crusaders, posed greater threats to the Syrian Ismailis than did the Franks. Consequently, Sinan initially attempted to establish peaceful relations with the Crusaders, who had been fighting the Syrian Ismailis intermittently for several decades over the possession of various strongholds. The Ismaili-Crusader entanglements had intensified from the late 1160s when King Amalric I of Jerusalem (1163–1174) had ceded numerous castles near those held by the Ismailis to the Templars and the Hospitallers, whose services he had increasingly used. While continuing to pay tribute to the Templars, who now controlled Tortosa and

its northern districts, the Syrian Ismailis had also begun to incur the hostility of the Hospitallers, who in 1142 had received from the lord of Tripoli their most famous castle, Krak des Chevaliers, in the vicinity of the Ismaili fortresses. Sinan made serious efforts to enter into peace negotiations with his Frankish neighbours through the intercession of King Amalric I.

In 1173, Sinan sent an ambassador to Amalric I seeking a formal rapprochement with the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, perhaps also in the hope of being relieved from the heavy tribute the Ismailis had been paying to the Templar military order. The Ismaili emissary evidently received a positive response from Amalric, obviously to the annoyance of the Templars. It is not, therefore, surprising that on his return journey, the Ismaili ambassador was ambushed and killed by Walter of Mesnil, a Knight Templar. King Amalric was profoundly embarrassed and angered by this act, which had been ordered by Odo of Saint Amand (ca. 1171–1179), the Grand Master of the Temple. In the event, Amalric personally led a force to Sidon and arrested Walter in the Templar's lodge, sending him to a prison in Tyre. Amalric also conveyed his apologies to Sinan. However, as Amalric died soon afterwards in July 1174, negotiations between Sinan and the Frankish king did not yield any lasting results. Archbishop William of Tyre, who was then in the service of Amalric, curiously reports that it was at the time of this embassy that Sinan had informed the king that he and his community intended to collectively convert to Christianity.[8] There is little doubt that the archbishop had misunderstood Sinan's genuine desire for improving his relations with the Latin kingdom. On the Zangid Nur al-Din's death in 1174, Salah al-Din, who had shortly earlier uprooted the Fatimid dynasty, emerged as the new champion of Sunni 'orthodoxy' and the Ismailis' most dangerous enemy. While Salah al-Din was extending his hegemony over Syria, Sinan was spurred by the Zangids of Aleppo, who were equally threatened, to confront Salah al-Din. On two occasions during 1174–1176, the Ismaili *fida'i*s made unsuccessful attempts on Salah al-Din's life.[9] Later, however, Sinan and Salah al-Din reached a peace accord under obscure circumstances.

Having established his rule over Egypt and Syria, Salah al-Din led the Muslim offensive against the Crusaders and finally seized

Jerusalem in 1187. The position of the Latin Kingdom had continuously deteriorated since the death of Amalric I in 1174. At the time of its fall, Jerusalem was ruled by Guy of Lusignan (1186–1192) by virtue of his marriage to Amalric I's daughter Sibylla. Guy of Lusignan as well as the Grand Masters of the Templars and the Hospitallers now spent a year in captivity before they were released by Salah al-Din under the terms of an agreement. By 1189, only Tyre, saved by the defensive efforts of Conrad of Montferrat, as well as Antioch and Tripoli, were still held by the Franks. It was under such circumstances that the Third Crusade was led to the Holy Land by King Richard I the Lionheart of England (1189–1199) and King Philip II Augustus of France (1180–1223), who were joined by their common nephew, Count Henry of Champagne. The new Crusader knights succeeded in 1191 in seizing Acre, which served as the new capital of the restored Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Marquis Conrad of Montferrat, who had played an important role in the overall success of the Third Crusade, developed his own claim to the throne of the Latin Kingdom on marrying in 1190 Sibylla's sister Isabella, daughter of King Amalric I. Conrad, designated as king-elect, had been conducting negotiations with Salah al-Din when his claim was officially recognized by the English King Richard I and the leading Crusader knights. As preparations were being made for Conrad's coronation in Acre, however, he was killed in April 1192 in Tyre by two assassins who had disguised themselves as Christian monks. This event is reported by the occidental chroniclers of the Third Crusade and by many Muslim historians.[10] There is much controversy regarding the instigator of this assassination. Many Muslim sources, as well as some European ones, state that Richard I, who was then still in the Holy Land and had an enmity with Conrad, arranged the murder. In fact, the king of England was later charged with this act when he was briefly imprisoned in Austria. In this connection it is interesting to note that English historians reproduce the texts of two letters supposedly written by the 'Old Man of the Mountain' to European dignitaries, absolving the king of England of any involvement in this plot.[11] On the other hand, Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233), the celebrated Muslim historian who disliked Salah al-Din, reports that it was the Ayyubid sultan who had asked Sinan to have both Conrad

and Richard killed.[12] A later Syrian Ismaili source attributes the initiative to Sinan himself.[13] Be that as it may, soon after Conrad's death, Richard I signed a peace treaty with Salah al-Din, at whose insistence the territory of the Syrian Ismailis was also included in the treaty.

Sinan led the Syrian Ismailis for some three decades to the peak of their power and fame; he died in 1193 in the castle of Kahf. A master in political strategy and the art of diplomacy, his appropriate alliances with the Crusaders, Salah al-Din and the Zangids served to ensure the independence of his community in difficult times. The origins of the legends of the Syrian Ismailis, made famous in the Crusader circles as the 'Assassins', may also be traced to his time. With the deaths of Sinan and Salah al-Din in 1193, and the declining fortunes of the Frankish states, an era in the complex Ismaili-Crusader relations had also come to an end.

Sinan's successors as leaders of the Syrian Ismailis exercised a certain degree of local initiative in their dealings with their Muslim and Frankish neighbours, though none of them attained Sinan's relative independence from Alamut. The Syrian Ismailis now enjoyed peaceful relations with Salah al-Din's successors in the Ayyubid dynasty, while maintaining fluctuating relations with the Crusaders and the military orders. In 1213, for instance, the *fida'i*s reportedly killed Raymond, son of Bohemond IV of Antioch (1187–1233), in the cathedral of Tortosa. In the following year, when Bohemond, in an act of revenge, besieged the Ismaili fortress of Khawabi, the Ismailis received timely assistance from the Ayyubids, forcing the Franks to retreat. It may be noted here that Bohemond's behaviour had made him unpopular in Crusader circles and among the Franks of Antioch; he had, in fact, been excommunicated in 1208 on orders from Pope Innocent III. Bohemond had also aroused the enmity of the military orders. In 1230, the Syrian Ismailis had helped the Hospitallers in their military campaign against him. It is, therefore, quite possible that the Crusaders themselves may have had a hand in Raymond's murder.

In the meantime, the Syrian Ismailis had found ways to exact tributes from a number of Muslim and Christian rulers. In 1227, for instance, Frederick II (1211–1250), the Hohenstaufen Holy Roman Emperor and titular King of Jerusalem who led his own Crusade to the Holy Land, sent an embassy to the leader of the Syrian Ismailis, a

daʿi named Majd al-Din. The German ambassadors had brought with them gifts worth 80,000 dinars.[14] Frederick too had his own disagreements with papal policies, which led to his excommunication by Pope Gregory IX. Under the circumstances, Frederick's rapprochement with the Ismailis met with the disapproval of the Hospitallers who were then attempting to make the Ismailis their own tributaries. At any rate, soon the Hospitallers did demand tribute from the Syrian Ismailis, who refused, boasting that they themselves received gifts and payments from a number of Frankish kings. In the aftermath of these futile negotiations, the Hospitallers attacked the Ismaili territory and carried off much booty.[15] By 1228, the Syrian Ismailis had become tributaries to the Hospitallers under the terms of a pact, while continuing to pay tribute to the Templars.

It seems that around this time the Ismailis even occasionally allied themselves with the Hospitallers against certain rulers of the Latin states; and they, in turn, were helped against the encroachments of the forces of Antioch and Tripoli. As an instance of this type of collaboration, mention may be made of the participation of an Ismaili contingent in the Hospitaller campaign of 1230 against Bohemond IV of Antioch. It was against this background that Bohemond V (1233–1257), the next prince of Antioch, complained to Pope Gregory IX about the unholy alliance between the Grand Master of the Hospital and the 'Assassins'. Subsequently in 1236, the pope sent letters to the Archbishop of Tyre and other religious authorities in Outremer insisting that any relations existing between the military orders and the 'Assassins, the enemies of God and of the Christians' should be terminated.[16]

The last important encounter between the Syrian Ismailis and the Crusaders occurred in connection with the diplomatic designs of King Louis IX of France (1226–1270), better known as St. Louis, the French king who led the Seventh Crusade. In the immediate aftermath of the early defeat of this Crusade, a late futile effort to recover the holy places of Christendom, Louis IX settled in Acre for four years (1250–1254). In Acre, emissaries of the local Ismaili leader, the *daʿi* Taj al-Din, came to the French king and asked him either to pay tribute to their chief like other contemporary monarchs or alternatively release the Ismailis from the tributes which they themselves

were still paying to the military orders. On the intervention of the Grand Masters of the Temple and the Hospital, namely, Reginald of Vichiers and William of Châteauneuf, these negotiations did not yield any important results, and the Ismailis continued for a while longer to pay tribute to the Templars and the Hospitallers. However, Louis IX also despatched his own envoys to the 'Old Man of the Mountain', including an Arabic-speaking friar, Yves the Breton, who discussed religious matters with the Ismaili chief. We have an eyewitness report of these dealings by the French chronicler John of Joinville (d. 1317), who accompanied Louis IX on his Crusade and became his secretary and intimate companion in Acre.[17]

In the meantime, the Mongols, who had already embarked on their conquests in the early decades of the 13th century, had attracted the attention of the Crusaders as a major power to be reckoned with. Still hoping to crush the Muslims through military force and impressed by the swift victories of the Mongols, the Europeans now made numerous diplomatic efforts to establish alliances with the Tatars, as they called the Mongols. The Muslims had already failed in their own efforts to win the support of the Christians against the Mongols. Earlier in 1238, as reported by Matthew Paris (d. 1259), the English Benedictine monk and historian, the Ismaili imam at Alamut ('Ala al-Din Muhammad) and the Abbasid caliph (al-Mustansir) had sent a joint mission to Europe seeking in vain the assistance of King Louis IX of France and King Henry III of England against the Mongols.[18] Whilst in the Holy Land, and aiming to cultivate his own relations with the Mongols against the Muslims, in 1253 Louis IX sent William of Rubruck to the court of the Great Khan Möngke in Mongolia. All these diplomatic endeavours proved futile, however. And when the Mongols began to complete their conquests in western Asia, their prime objectives were the destruction of the Ismaili state centred at Alamut and the Abbasid caliphate – objectives that were accomplished efficiently and brutally in 1256 and 1258 respectively.[19]

In the wake of the Mongol invasions, the Ismailis of Persia were dislodged from their traditional fortress communities. Those who had escaped the Mongol massacres were reduced to small groups living clandestinely in remote areas; many migrated to Central Asia and India. The Nizari Ismailis had now permanently lost their

political prominence and survived merely as an obscure religious minority. In Syria, the Ismailis were spared the Mongol catastrophe. However, it did not take long for the Syrian Ismailis to lose their own political independence to the Mamluks, who were then establishing their rule over Egypt and Syria in succession to the Ayyubids. The Mamluks had, in effect, checked the advance of the Mongols in Syria in 1260. By 1267, the Syrian Ismailis had become tributaries to Baybars I (1260–1277), the same Mamluk sultan who eventually expelled the Mongols from Syria and also inflicted a decisive defeat on the Crusaders. It was only in 1266 that, as subjects and tributaries of the Mamluks, the Ismailis were no longer required to pay tribute to the military orders. The Ismaili castles in Syria now began to submit in rapid succession to Baybars.[20] In 1273, with the fall of Kahf, their last outpost, the Syrian Ismailis had lost any nominal independence they may have precariously enjoyed. But the Ismailis were permitted to remain in their fortresses in Jabal Bahra under the surveillance of Mamluk overseers. There are some scattered reports indicating that Baybars and his successors in the Mamluk dynasty were assisted by the Ismailis against their own enemies.[21] At all events, with the loss of their independence and political power, the Ismailis ceased to have any more direct contacts with the Crusaders. In 1291, the Mamluks also finally ended Frankish rule in Outremer, dispelling any lingering Christian hope for a lasting military victory over the Muslims.

Meanwhile, the revolt of the Persian Ismailis, under the original leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah, against the Saljuq Turks had called forth another Sunni campaign against the Ismailis. The new campaign, sponsored by the Saljuq-Abbasid establishment, with military and literary components, was initiated by Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092), the all-powerful vizier and virtual master of the Saljuq sultanate for more than two decades. Nizam al-Mulk, who sent major expeditions against Alamut and other strongholds of the Persian Ismailis, had given an early warning to the Saljuq sultan of the imminent danger of the Persian Ismailis. Indeed, he condemned the Ismailis in the strongest possible terms in his *Siyasat-nama* (*The Book of Government*), accusing them of aiming to abolish Islam.[22] Around the same time, the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, who was no more than a puppet in the hands of the Saljuq sultan, commissioned al-Ghazali (d. 1111), the

most learned theologian of the time, to write a work in refutation of the Ismailis, or the Batinis (Esotericists) as they were also designated by their adversaries. In this polemical work, commonly known as *al-Mustazhiri* after the ruling Abbasid caliph al-Mustazhir (1094–1118), al-Ghazali attributes a variety of heretical beliefs and practices to the Ismailis, especially the Nizari Ismailis, who were alleged to have had an elaborate graded system of initiation and indoctrination leading to an ultimate stage of atheism.[23] Al-Ghazali's defamations were adopted by other Sunni authors, including Saljuq chroniclers. By the opening decades of the 12th century, another active anti-Ismaili literary campaign was well under way, together with widespread persecution of the Nizari Ismailis of different localities in Persia and Syria.

The new expressions of hostility towards the Nizari Ismailis, rooted in an earlier 'black legend', proved highly effective in shaping the anti-Nizari opinions of the medieval Muslims. On the basis of highly fictitious accounts of their heretical beliefs and libertine practices, the Nizari Ismailis were depicted essentially as immoral heretics capable of any kind of crime or senseless murder desired by their malevolent leaders. They were, thus, the arch-heretics, the *malahida* par excellence. From the 1120s, the Nizari Ismailis, especially those in Syria, also began to be referred to with the abusive appellation of *hashishiyya* (singular, *hashishi*) by their Muslim opponents without any explanation.[24] It should be noted in this connection that in all Muslim sources in which the Nizari Ismailis are designated as *hashishi*s, this term is evidently used in its abusive senses of 'low-class rabble' or 'irreligious social outcasts', without any reference to the actual use of hashish or any other narcotic product by the sectarians. It was under such circumstances that the Crusaders first came into contact with the Nizari Ismailis of Syria.

By the time of the First Crusade, Europeans were still rather ignorant of Islam as a religion and its divisions. The Crusaders, as noted, lived for a long period in close proximity to the Muslims, with whom they had extensive military, diplomatic, social and commercial relations. However, they do not seem to have ever become interested in gathering accurate information about Islam or the Muslim communities in their surroundings. The Crusaders brought with them institutions rooted in the feudal society of medieval Europe, which

they adopted in the Latin Orient without much regard to the realities of their new environment. As a result, the feudal superstructure of the Latin states remained quite removed from the indigenous society, although there were extensive contacts between them. The Crusader settlers in Outremer were, in fact, sustained by an Arabic-speaking local community, composed mainly of Muslims. But there was very little cultural contact between the Crusaders and the Muslims, such as those existing between Christians, Jews and Muslims in Muslim Spain. Consequently, the Crusaders continued to remain ignorant of Islam, although Islam and the Prophet Muhammad had now become more familiar notions in Europe. As R.W. Southern (1912–2001) has observed, the authors of these new concepts, too, had luxuriated in the ignorance of triumphant imagination.[25] Based on oral testimony and distorted information, and greatly stimulated by the fireside tales of the returning Crusaders, the new, post-Crusade picture of Islam was indeed fabricated at a time of great imaginative speculation in Europe. Perceiving Islam as a false religion or even a Christian heresy, the Crusaders and their chroniclers were not essentially interested in acquiring first-hand information in Outremer about Islam. Being more interested in refuting and condemning Islam, their purpose would be better served by fabricating evidence, in addition to popularizing misconceptions about the Muslim practices, including especially those related to the Ismailis who had attracted their attention.

It was during the second half of the 12th century, when Rashid al-Din Sinan was still the leader of the Syrian Ismailis, that Crusader chroniclers and occidental travellers began to write specifically about these sectarians. Benjamin of Tudela, the Spanish rabbi who passed through Syria in 1167, is perhaps the earliest European to have mentioned the Syrian Ismailis. Referring to them as *Hashishin*, he was greatly impressed by the obedience of these sectarians to their leader.[26] Benjamin and other Westerners, who received their information about Muslims mainly through oral channels, heard and picked up locally in Syria Arabic variants of the term *hashishi*, which was applied pejoratively by other Muslims to the Nizari Ismailis during the 12th and 13th centuries. This term served as the basis for a number of names, such as Assassini, Assissini and Heyssessini, by which the

Syrian Nizari Ismailis came to be designated in base-Latin sources of the Crusaders in different European languages. Muslim authors, who were much better informed about the Ismailis as well as about Shi'i martyrology, did not actually accuse the Ismailis or their *fida'i*s of using hashish in their communal practices. But the hashish connection proved particularly appealing to medieval Westerners who needed simple explanations for the seemingly irrational behaviour of the *fida'i*s. Indeed, the available evidence shows that it was the name hashish that in time led to the belief that the *fida'i*s used hashish in a regular manner. At any rate, the stage was now set for the formation of the so-called Assassin legends – myths that aimed to explain the secret practices of the Nizari Ismailis.

The Crusaders, as noted, were particularly impressed by the accounts of the Ismaili assassinations, always reported in an exaggerated manner, and the daring behaviour of the *fida'i*s who rarely survived their missions. This explains why the Assassin legends, originating in occidental circles and rooted in their 'imaginative ignorance', came to revolve around the recruitment and training of the *fida'i*s. Several generations of Europeans, starting in the second half of the 12th century, participated in the process of fabricating, transmitting and legitimizing the Assassin legends, which consisted of a number of separate but connected tales. The legends developed gradually, from simpler to more elaborate versions. By the second half of the 13th century, the legends had acquired wide currency in the Latin Orient and Europe, and they were accepted as reliable descriptions of secret Nizari Ismaili practices, much in the same way that the earlier anti-Ismaili 'black legend' of Muslim polemicists had been accepted as the true expression of Ismaili aims and teachings.[27]

The earliest version of the European myths of the Assassins may be traced to a diplomatic report prepared by Burchard of Strassburg, who was sent in 1175 to Saladin (Salah al-Din) as an envoy of Frederick I Barbarossa (1152–1190), the Hohenstaufen Holy Roman Emperor.[28] In his report, Burchard included a section on the 'Heyssessini' and the training of their *fida'i*s, who were allegedly raised in isolation and taught obedience from childhood. Henceforth, any European author writing on the subject also had something to say about the recruitment and training of the Ismaili *fida'i*s, with the

major exception of William of Tyre, who did not contribute to the formation of the Assassin legends. In the hands of James of Vitry, Bishop of Acre (1216–1228), the Assassin legends experienced another major embellishment. He is the earliest Western author to refer to the training localities of the *fida'i*s as 'secret and delightful places', implying that the *fida'i*s enjoyed certain delights in the course of their training. Another milestone in the elaboration of the Assassin legends may be traced to Arnold of Lübeck (d. 1212), the German abbot and historian who had access to Burchard's report in addition to his own direct oral sources in the Latin East. Arnold's narrative, contained in his *Chronicle*, seems to be the earliest occidental source referring to an intoxicating potion administered by the 'Old Man of the Mountain' to the would-be *fida'i*s to enable them to enjoy the delights of the celestial Paradise in a hallucinatory fashion; this represents the first statement of a new legend, the 'hashish legend', which was later adopted by Marco Polo (1254–1324). In this account, the Old Man diabolically motivates the *fida'i*s into self-sacrifice by stimulating in them, under the influence of a drug, a delusion of the delights of Paradise. The otherworldly reward actually expected by the *fida'i*s, according to their beliefs, now acquired a terrestrial dimension. But Arnold of Lübeck stopped short of fantasizing about an actual 'garden of paradise' designed specifically for the training of the *fida'i*s – a task fully accomplished later by Marco Polo, who gave the Assassin legends a new lease of life.

Marco Polo embarked on his famous journey to China in 1271, and after spending some seventeen years in the service of the Great Khan, he returned to his native Venice in 1295. In 1298–1299, whilst imprisoned in Genoa, Marco Polo finally dictated his memories of 'the kingdoms and marvels of the East' to a fellow-prisoner, a romance-writer called Rustichello, who may have added his own emendations to the text. As one of its digressionary notes, the text of Marco Polo's travels includes a description of the 'Old Man of the Mountain and his Assassins.'[29] At least part of this note may have been inserted by Rustichello himself or even a later scribe. At any rate, it represents the most elaborate synthesis of the Assassin legends together with an original contribution in the form of the Old Man of the Mountain's 'secret garden of paradise'.

According to Marco Polo's account, the training of the *fida'i*s involved a crucial last stage in which the duped youngsters spent a brief period in a simulated 'garden of paradise'. The would-be *fida'i*s, it was claimed, were put to sleep under the influence of hashish or some such drug and then carried to this garden where they experienced a variety of bodily pleasures procured for them. And the *fida'i*s became self-sacrificing and absolutely obedient to their chief because they had experienced these unthinkable carnal delights, which they desired to enjoy in perpetuity. It is interesting to note that the 'secret garden', allegedly designed by the Old Man at his castle for the sole purpose of deceiving the would-be *fida'i*s, was closely modelled on Paradise as described in the Qur'an. Needless to add, such a garden was never discovered in any of the Ismaili castles of Persia or Syria.

By the second half of the 14th century, Marco Polo's travelogue had circulated widely and stirred the imagination of Europeans. In particular, his own elaborate version of the Assassin legends came to be variously adopted by countless generations of Europeans as the standard description of the 'Assassins' and their secret practices. It is indeed safe to say that until the 19th century, European knowledge of the Nizari Ismailis had not progressed much beyond what the Crusaders and their chroniclers had transmitted on the subject, with the Assassin legends retaining a central position in these accounts.[30] In the meantime, by the middle of the 14th century, the word 'assassin', instead of signifying the name of the Nizari Ismailis, had acquired a wider meaning in European languages. Generalizing from the activities of the *fida'i*s, it now became a common noun describing a professional murderer. It did not take long before the origin of the word 'assassin' was completely forgotten.

It was under such circumstances that the medieval Assassin legends reappeared in the 19th century in the studies of the orientalists dealing with the Ismailis. The most widely read book in this category, and the first monograph devoted to the Nizari Ismailis of the Alamut period, was written by von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856), the Austrian orientalist-diplomat. In this book, published originally in German in 1818, von Hammer accepted Marco Polo's account in its entirety.[31] Even Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838), the doyen of orientalists, who finally solved the mystery of the etymology of the name

'Assassins', partially endorsed the Assassin legends of the Crusader times as well as the earlier anti-Ismaili 'black legend' of the Sunni polemicists.[32] In fact, under de Sacy's authority the legends were reintroduced into the orientalist circles of Europe. The seminal Assassin legends, with the accompanying distorted image of the Nizari Ismailis, defied dispellment even by the 'scientific' orientalism of the 19th century. Thus, the legacy of the Ismaili-Crusader encounters persisted to modern times in the form of a number of myths of the Ismailis and a new word 'assassin' in European languages.

As a result of the modern progress in Ismaili scholarship, it has finally become also possible to deconstruct the Assassin legends, distinguishing historical fact from fiction and misrepresentation in these exotic tales of hashish, daggers and mystifying obedience. Having circulated for more than eight centuries, the Assassin legends should now be essentially recognized as nothing more than imaginative medieval myths rooted in the Crusaders' misguided perceptions of Islam as well as the Ismailis and the nature of their struggle.

Notes

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2. In addition to the sources cited above, see B. Lewis, 'The Isma'ilites and the Assassins', in Kenneth M. Setton, ed., *A History of the Crusades*: Volume I, *The First Hundred Years*, ed. Marshall W. Baldwin (2nd ed., Madison, WI, 1969), pp. 99–132.

3. William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, ed. Robert B.C. Huygens (Turnhout, 1986), pp. 620–622, 656–657; English trans., *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, tr. Emily A. Babcock and August C. Krey (New York, 1943), vol. 2, p. 77.

4. William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, p. 953; tr. Babcock and Krey, vol. 2, p. 391. On the Nizari castles in Syria and their epigraphic evidence, see Max van Berchem, 'Épigraphie des Assassins de Syrie' *Journal Asiatique*, 9 série, 9 (1897), pp. 453–501; reprinted in his *Opera Minora* (Geneva, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 453–501.

5. William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, pp. 770–772; tr. Babcock and Krey, vol. 2, pp. 196–198, and N. Elisséeff, *Nur ad-Din, un grand prince Musulman de Syrie au temps des Croisades* (Damascus, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 430–432.

6. William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, pp. 786–787; tr. Babcock and Krey, vol. 2, pp. 214–215, and Ibn al-Furat, *Ta'rikh al-duwal wa'l-muluk*, ed. C. Zurayk (Beirut, 1936–42), vol. 8, p. 79.

7. On Sinan's life and career, see S. Guyard, 'Un grand maître des Assassins au temps de Saladin', *Journal Asiatique*, 7 série, 9 (1877), pp. 387–489, containing the text and translation of an Ismaili hagiographic work attributed to the Nizari *da'i* Abu Firas Shihab al-Din al-Maynaqi who flourished in the sixteenth century. Ibn al-'Adim's biography of Sinan, as preserved in later recensions, is contained in B. Lewis, 'Kamal al-Din's Biography of Rašid al-Din Sinan', *Arabica*, 13 (1966), pp. 225–267; reprinted in his *Studies in Classical and Ottoman Islam (7th–16th Centuries)* (London, 1976), article X. See also Nasseh A. Mirza, *Syrian Ismailism* (Richmond, Surrey, 1997), pp. 19–39, and F. Daftary, 'Rashid al-Din Sinan', *EI2*, vol. 8, pp. 442–443.

8. William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, pp. 954–956; tr. Babcock and Krey, vol. 2, pp. 392–394; Jerzy Hauziński, 'On Alleged Attempts at Converting the Assassins to Christianity in the Light of William of Tyre's Account', *Folia Orientalia*, 15 (1974), pp. 229–246, and M. Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 100–105.

9. Abu Shama, *Kitab al-rawdatayn fi akhbar al-dawlatayn* (Cairo, 1287–88/1870–71), vol. 1, pp. 239–240, 258; B. Lewis, 'Saladin and the Assassins', *BSOAS*, 15 (1953), pp. 239–245; reprinted in his *Studies*, article IX, and M.C. Lyons and D.E.P. Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 87–88, 99, 105–106, 108–109.

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11. See, for instance, Joseph F. Michaud, *Michaud's History of the Crusades*, tr. W. Robson (London, 1852), vol. 3, pp. 434–435.

12. Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi'l-ta'rikh*, ed. C.J. Tornberg (Leiden, 1851–76), vol. 12, p. 51.

13. Abu Firas Shihab al-Din, *Fasl*, in Guyard, 'Un grand maître', translation pp. 408–412, text pp. 463–466; English trans. in Gabrieli, *Arab Historians*, pp. 242–245.

14. Abu'l-Fada'il Muhammad al-Hamawi, *al-Ta'rikh al-Mansuri*, ed. P.A. Gryaznevich (Moscow, 1963), pp. 335–336, 340, 348.

15. Al-Hamawi, *al-Ta'rikh*, pp. 340–341.

16. For the text of this letter, see E.J. King, *The Knights Hospitallers in the Holy Land* (London, 1931), pp. 234–235. See also J. Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St. John in Jerusalem and Cyprus* (London, 1967), pp. 138–140, 162, 164.

17. See Jean de Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis*, ed. Natalis de Wailly (Paris, 1868), pp. 218–224; English trans., *Memoirs of John Lord de Joinville*, tr. T. Johnes (Hafod, 1807), vol. 1, pp. 194–197; also as *The Memoirs of the Lord of Joinville: A New English Version*, tr. E. Wedgwood (London, 1906), pp. 233–239; reprinted in *Chronicles of the Crusades* (London, 1848), pp. 470–474. See also Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 3, pp. 279–280, and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 7–8.

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24. See, for instance, Abu Shama, *Kitab al-rawdatayn*, vol. 1, pp. 240, 258; Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbar Misr*, ed. A.F. Sayyid (Cairo, 1981), p. 102, and W. Madelung, ed., *Arabic Texts Concerning the History of the Zaydi Imams of Tabaristan, Daylaman and Gilan* (Beirut and Wiesbaden, 1987), pp. 146, 329.

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28. For details of Burchard's account and later versions of the legends, together with their sources, see F. Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis* (London, 1994), especially pp. 88–127.

29. Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, ed. and tr. Henry Yule, 3rd revised ed. by Henri Cordier (London, 1929), vol. 1, pp. 139–146.

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31. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Die Geschichte der Assassinen* (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1818); English trans., *The History of the Assassins*, tr. Oswald C. Wood (London, 1835; reprinted, New York 1968).

32. Antoine I. Silvestre de Sacy, 'Mémoire sur la dynastie des Assassins, et sur l'étymologie de leur nom', *Mémoires de l'Institut Royal de France*, 4 (1818),

pp. 1–84; reprinted in Bryan S. Turner, ed., *Orientalism: Early Sources*, Volume I, *Readings in Orientalism* (London, 2000), pp. 118–169; English trans., 'Memoir on the Dynasty of the Assassins, and on the Etymology of their Name', in Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, pp. 136–188.

9

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and the Ismailis

One of the most learned Muslim scholars of medieval times, Nasir al-Din Abu Jaʿfar Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Tusi was born into an Imami Shiʿi family in Tus, Khurasan, in 597/1201.* He was still in his youth when the Mongols began invading Transoxania and Khurasan prior to completing their conquest of Persia. It was soon after the first waves of the Mongol conquests that numerous Muslim scholars, both Shiʿi and Sunni, fleeing from the Mongol hordes, found refuge in the Nizari Ismaili strongholds of Quhistan (or Kuhistan) in south-eastern Khurasan. These scholars, availing themselves of the Nizari libraries and patronage of learning, played a key role in reinvigorating the intellectual endeavours of the Nizari Ismailis of Persia during the late Alamut period of their history. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi was the most prominent member of the group of scholars who found a safe haven in Qa'in and other Nizari Ismaili strongholds of Quhistan; he also made important contributions to the Nizari Ismaili thought of the period.

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi was already an accomplished scholar when he left Nishapur at a young age and entered the Nizari stronghold community of eastern Persia in 624/1227. He immediately joined the service of Nasir al-Din ʿAbd al-Rahim b. Abi Mansur (d. 655/1257), the *muhtasham* or principal local leader of the Nizaris of Quhistan. The Nizaris of Persia, and elsewhere, were then under the overall leadership of ʿAla' al-Din Muhammad (618–653/1221–1255), their imam and the penultimate lord of Alamut. A learned man in his own right, the *muhtasham* Nasir al-Din gave refuge to many men of learning, and generally encouraged the intellectual activities of scholars at his

court. Above all, he acted as patron to Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, whom he had personally invited to Quhistan. A long and fruitful intellectual collaboration was to develop between Nasir al-Din ʿAbd al-Rahim and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, resulting in a multitude of treatises and discourses from the pen of the most eminent Muslim scholar of the time.

Later, al-Tusi went to the mountain fortress of Alamut, the central headquarters of the Nizari Ismaili state and *daʿwa* or mission in northern Persia, and enjoyed the munificence of the Nizari imam himself until the collapse of the Nizari state under the onslaught of Hulagu's Mongol armies. Al-Tusi was with the last lord of Alamut, Rukn al-Din Khurshah (653–654/1255–1256), when, after a few days of fierce fighting, he finally came down from the fortress of Maymundiz in the vicinity of Alamut on 29 Shawwal 654/19 November 1256 and surrendered to the Mongols,[1] marking the end of the Alamut period in Nizari Ismaili history. Subsequently, al-Tusi became a trusted adviser to Hulagu (d. 663/1265), and accompanied the Mongol conqueror to Baghdad, the seat of the Abbasid caliphate and the second target (after the Ismaili strongholds in Persia) set by the Great Khan Möngke for the Mongol campaigns in western Asia.[2] Al-Tusi now availed himself of the patronage of Hulagu, who built a great observatory and institution of learning for him in Maragha, Adharbayjan. Al-Tusi also continued his scientific enquiries under Abaqa (663–680/1265– 1282), Hulagu's successor in the Ilkhanid dynasty. Having also acted as vizier to the Ilkhanids, al-Tusi died in Baghdad in 672/1274.

Thus, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi spent some three decades in the Nizari Ismaili strongholds of Persia. During this period, the most productive of his life, al-Tusi wrote numerous treatises on astronomy, mathematics, theology, philosophy and many other subjects. Whilst still in Quhistan, the *muhtasham* Nasir al-Din commissioned al-Tusi to translate from Arabic into Persian, with additional passages and commentary, Abu ʿAli Ahmad Miskawayh's *Kitab al-tahara*, also known as the *Tahdhib al-akhlaq*. The resulting treatise, completed in 633/1235, has survived under the title of *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*.[3] Dedicated to al-Tusi's patron, Nasir al-Din, this work originally contained a laudatory preamble to that effect.[4] It was in recognition of his close relations with his Ismaili patron in Quhistan that al-Tusi also dedicated his other

famous work on ethics, *Akhlaq-i muhtashami*, to the *muhtasham* Nasir al-Din. Later, he wrote his *Risala-yi Mu'iniyya* on astronomy, with a Persian commentary, for Nasir al-Din's son, Abu'l-Shams Mu'in al-Din. Among other works written during al-Tusi's years in the Ismaili fortress communities, mention may be made of his main treatise on logic, *Asas al-iqtibas*, completed in 642/1244, as well as his well-known commentary entitled *Sharh al-isharat* on Ibn Sina's *al-Isharat wa'l-tanbihat*. To this period also belongs al-Tusi's spiritual autobiography, *Sayr va suluk*,[5] addressed to his Ismaili patrons; a few works explaining the Ismaili teachings of the Alamut period; and brief treatises bearing Ismaili imprints such as the *Aghaz va anjam* and the *Tawalla va tabarra*.[6]

There is much controversy surrounding the circumstances of al-Tusi's long stay among the Nizari Ismailis of Persia and his 'true' religious affiliation during that time. In particular, scholars have speculated as to whether he ever embraced Ismailism whilst among the Ismailis. Twelver Shi'i scholars, who consider al-Tusi as one of their co-religionists, have traditionally held that he was detained among the Ismailis against his will, also denying the possibility of his conversion.[7] Similar views are expressed by al-Tusi's modern Twelver biographers.[8] They interpret al-Tusi's occasional complaints about the difficult circumstances of his life,[9] to imply that he had indeed remained a captive in Alamut and other Nizari fortresses. They also question the authenticity of the Ismaili works attributed to him, while some of them believe that al-Tusi, in observing *taqiyya* as a Twelver Shi'i, may have been obliged to compose these works to safeguard himself in captivity. On the other hand, some modern scholars concede that al-Tusi, for a variety of reasons, may have temporarily converted to Ismailism during his stay in the Nizari fortress communities.[10]

There are also those scholars who have investigated al-Tusi's Ismaili connections from non-religious perspectives. In this context, particular mention may be made of W. Madelung's argument to the effect that al-Tusi remained with the Ismailis voluntarily because of philosophical concerns.[11] More recently, H. Dabashi has argued that al-Tusi can be understood neither as an Imami Shi'i (who may or may not have been obliged to convert to Ismailism) nor as an individual

lacking stable moral principles, but primarily as a philosopher/vizier simultaneously concerned with matters of power and knowledge, politics and philosophy; and as such, he took full advantage of the socio-political context of his time.[12] According to this plausible perspective, al-Tusi belongs to a category transcending sectarian divisions, an important category in Persian political culture which serves to explain his shifting religious affiliations and political associations with the Twelver Shi'is, the Ismailis and the Mongols.

Many issues in the history and doctrines of the Nizari Ismailis of the Alamut period (483–654/1090–1256) are obscure, mainly due to the fact that the meagre literature produced by them did not survive the Mongol catastrophe. The famous library at Alamut, where al-Tusi spent countless days, was completely burnt by the Mongol conquerors, except for a few manuscripts and scientific instruments saved by Juwayni (d. 681/1283), the historian who was in the service of Hulagu and accompanied him on his military campaigns against the Nizari strongholds in Persia. Juwayni participated actively in the truce negotiations between Hulagu and Rukn al-Din Khurshah. In all probability al-Tusi, too, took part in these negotiations as he had encouraged the Nizaris to reach a peaceful settlement with the Mongols. Subsequently, Juwayni and al-Tusi accompanied Hulagu to Baghdad, which had its own tragic encounter with the Mongols in 656/1258; and both men were rewarded by Hulagu in due course, Juwayni with the governorship of the former Abbasid capital and al-Tusi with his own institution of learning at Maragha. Be that as it may, there is no evidence suggesting that al-Tusi or any of the other outside scholars were ever held against their wishes by the Persian Nizaris, nor that they were at any time coerced into conversion, a policy never adopted by the Ismailis in the Alamut period or at any other time in their history.

Taking into account all the circumstances of al-Tusi's life and career, especially including his long and productive stay among the Nizari Ismailis and the latter's generally liberal policy towards the non-Ismaili scholars and scientists living in their midst, it is safe to assume that al-Tusi joined the Nizaris and participated in the intellectual life of their community willingly and for his own 'scholarly' motives. Furthermore, if the authenticity of his spiritual autobiogra-

phy *Sayr va suluk* is recognized, and there is no reason to cast doubt on this, he also claims to have embraced Ismailism sometime during his stay in the Nizari strongholds, although later, upon joining the Mongols in 654/1256, he reverted to Twelver Shiʿism (Ithnaʿashariyya) and wrote several works on Imami *kalam* theology such as the *Tajrid al-ʿaqa'id*, in which he combined the basic Imami tenets with Ibn Sina's philosophy. He came to be recognized as the foremost Muslim philosopher of his time, and carried honorific titles such as Khwaja (Master) and Malik al-Hukama (King of the Philosophers).

In the unsettled conditions of the time, the Nizari fortresses of Persia served as safe havens where al-Tusi could pursue his scientific enquiries. And he took full advantage of this opportunity, as well as the Nizaris' patronage of learning and their libraries, in much the same way as he later benefited from the munificence of the Mongols. In this context, the 'true' religious affiliation of al-Tusi during his long years in Qa'in, Alamut and other Nizari strongholds of Persia does not present itself as a particularly significant subject of enquiry. At any rate, it was under such complex circumstances that al-Tusi, the multi-faceted scholar whose intellectual interests covered a diversity of disciplines, evidently also took it upon himself to study the teachings of the Ismailis amongst whom he spent three of the most productive and secure decades of his life. A Shiʿi scholar of al-Tusi's calibre and varied interests, with access to unique collections of Ismaili manuscripts and archival documents, was indeed very well situated for undertaking this intellectual challenge. As in his writings on Imami theology, astronomy, philosophy and other fields of learning, he excelled in this area too, making significant contributions to the Nizari Ismaili thought of the period. It is in this sense, then, that the Ismaili works attributed to Nasir al-Din al-Tusi must be studied and appreciated, and not as the writings of an eminent medieval Muslim scholar who may or may not have adhered to Ismailism at the time. Our present state of knowledge does not allow us to say more about al-Tusi's Ismaili affiliation. Foremost among the Ismaili works attributed to al-Tusi, and preserved by the Persian-speaking Nizaris of Persia, Afghanistan, Tajik Badakhshan and northern areas of Pakistan, mention should be made of the *Rawdat al-taslim* (*Garden of Submission*).[13] This Persian treatise, also known as the *Tasawwu-*

rat and completed in 640/1243, in fact represents a comprehensive philosophical treatment of the Nizari Ismaili thought of the Alamut period; and as such is the single most valuable work belonging to the extant Nizari literary heritage of this period.

Hasan-i Sabbah's seizure of the fortress of Alamut in 483/1090 signalled the foundation of what was to become the Nizari Ismaili state. The Nizari state, centred at Alamut and with territories in different parts of Persia and Syria, survived for some 166 years despite the incessant hostilities of the Saljuqs and their successors until the arrival of the all-conquering Mongols in 654/1256. From early on, the Nizari Ismailis were preoccupied with their revolutionary campaign and survival in an extremely hostile environment. Accordingly, they produced strategists and military commanders rather than theologians and philosophers as in earlier Fatimid times. Nevertheless, the Persian Nizaris did maintain a literary tradition, elaborating their teachings in response to the changed circumstances of the Alamut period. Hasan-i Sabbah himself was a learned theologian and well-grounded in philosophical discourse; he is also credited with establishing the library at Alamut. Later, other major Nizari Ismaili fortresses in Persia and Syria were equipped with impressive collections of books and scientific instruments.

In the doctrinal field, the Nizari Ismailis from early on reaffirmed as their central teaching the old Shi'i doctrine of *ta'lim* or the necessity of authoritative teaching by a trustworthy guide, viz., the rightful imam of the time. In its fully developed form the reformulation of the doctrine of *ta'lim* is generally ascribed to Hasan-i Sabbah or Baba Sayyidna as he was commonly addressed by contemporary Nizaris. He restated this doctrine in a more vigorous form in a theological treatise entitled *Fusul-i arba'a* or the *Four Chapters*. This treatise has not survived directly, but it has been preserved fragmentarily by Hasan's contemporary, al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153),[14] the eminent Ash'ari theologian and heresiographer who was well informed about Ismaili teachings and wrote several works bearing strong Ismaili imprints. Hasan's treatise was also seen and paraphrased by a group of Persian historians,[15] who are our main authorities for the history of the Nizari state in Persia. In this treatise, in a series of four propositions, Hasan-i Sabbah strove to show the inadequacy of human reason (*'aql*) by itself

in enabling men to understand religious truths and to know God; and therefore, the need for a single authoritative teacher (*muʿallim-i sadiq*) to act as the spiritual guide of men.

The doctrine of *taʿlim* with its philosophical underpinning is expounded throughout al-Tusi's *Sayr va suluk*, which explains how its author's search for knowledge and truth eventually led him to the community of the Ahl-i Taʿlim, or the Ismailis, and their imam. It is interesting to note that al-Shahrastani is mentioned in the *Sayr va suluk* as a *daʿi* and the teacher of the maternal uncle (and instructor) of al-Tusi's father. Al-Tusi also implies that he was influenced by al-Shahrastani's Ismaili teachings. It may be added in passing, however, that in his post-Ismaili period al-Tusi wrote a rebuttal, *Masariʿ al-musariʿ* (*The Downfall of the Wrestlers*), to al-Shahrastani's *Musaraʿat al-falasifa*, which was a refutation of Ibn Sina's metaphysics on the basis of reasoning fully in line with traditional Ismaili theology.[16]

The doctrine of *taʿlim* with various modifications provided the foundation for all the subsequent Nizari teachings of the Alamut period. With the all-important Nizari emphasis on the autonomous teaching authority of their current imam, the fourth lord of Alamut, Hasan II (557–561/1162–1166), proclaimed the *qiyama* or Resurrection in 559/1164, also claiming for himself the imamate of the Nizaris as a descendant of Nizar b. al-Mustansir and the rank of the *qaʾim* of the Resurrection (*qaʾim-i qiyamat*). This declaration, with its esoteric exegesis (*taʾwil*), persuaded the Nizaris to regard themselves spiritually and symbolically 'independent' of the outside world, a hostile world that was now considered as irrelevant and, therefore, spiritually non-existent. The sixth lord of Alamut, Jalal al-Din Hasan (607–618/1210–1221), initiated his own religious policy. He repudiated some of the interpretations associated with the declaration of the *qiyama* and attempted a daring rapprochement with the Sunni world, commanding his community to observe the *shariʿa* in its Shafiʿi Sunni form. Jalal al-Din Hasan's policy had obvious political advantages for the Nizaris who had been hitherto marginalized as 'heretics' (*malahida*) for a long time. The Nizari state was recognized for the first time by the Abbasid caliph al-Nasir, and the Nizaris of Quhistan and Syria received timely assistance and more security from their Sunni neighbours. All these changing Nizari teachings and policies must

have been rather perplexing to the rank and file of the community. Therefore, the Nizari leadership in the time of Jalal al-Din Hasan's son and successor, 'Ala' al-Din Muhammad (618–653/1221–1255), made a systematic effort to explain the different doctrinal declarations and positions of the lords of Alamut regarding the *qiyama*. The earlier teachings were now interpreted comprehensively within a coherent doctrinal framework, aiming to provide satisfactory explanations for the policies adopted at Alamut. It was under such circumstances that the *Rawdat al-taslim*, al-Tusi's major Ismaili treatise, was composed.

The *Rawdat al-taslim* provides an integrated theological framework for contextualizing the religious policies of the different lords of Alamut, seeking to demonstrate that these seemingly contradictory positions partook of a singular spiritual reality, since each imam had acted in accordance with the exigencies of his own time. In the process, al-Tusi made important contributions to the Nizari thought of his time and expounded an adjusted doctrine which may be called the *satr* doctrine. *Qiyama*, al-Tusi explained in the *Rawdat al-taslim*, was not necessarily a final or single eschatological event in the history of mankind, but a transitory condition of life, when the veil of *taqiyya* or dissimulation would be removed so as to make the unveiled truth accessible. Thus, the identification between *shari'a* and *taqiyya,* tacitly implied by the teachings of Hasan II,[17] referred to by the Nizaris as *'ala dhikrihi'l-salam* ('on his mention be peace'), was confirmed by al-Tusi, who also identified *qiyama* with *haqiqa*. In this framework, the imposition of the Sunni *shari'a* by Jalal al-Din Hasan was presented as a return to *taqiyya*, and to a new period (*dawr*) of *satr* or concealment, when the truth (*haqiqa*) would once again be hidden in the *batin* or the esoteric dimension of religion. The condition of *qiyama* could, in principle, be granted by the current imam to mankind or to its elite (*khawass*) at any time, because every imam was potentially also an *imam-qa'im*. In other words, human life and history could alternate between periods of *qiyama* when reality is manifest, and *satr* when it would be concealed. It was in this sense that Hasan II had introduced a period of *qiyama* in 559/1164, while his grandson terminated that period and initiated a new period of *satr* requiring the observance of *taqiyya* in any accommodating form. Al-Tusi clearly allows for such alterations by stating that each prophetic

era associated with the *zahir* of the *shariʿa* is a period of *satr*, while that of an *imam-qa'im*, who reveals the inner truths or the *haqa'iq* of religious laws, is one of *qiyama* representing an era of manifestation (*dawr-i kashf*).[18] In the current cycle of the religious history of mankind, however, it was still expected that the full *qiyama*, or the Great Resurrection (*qiyamat-i qiyamat*), would occur at the end of the final millennial era after Adam, that is, at the end of the sixth era (the era of Islam) initiated by the Prophet Muhammad.

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi had access to the Ismaili texts of the Fatimid period which were in the manuscript collections of the libraries at Alamut and Qa'in. These must have included the writings of the learned *daʿi*s of the Iranian lands, such as Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani, Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani and Nasir-i Khusraw who had founded the unique intellectual tradition of philosophical Ismailism, interfacing Ismaili theology with Neoplatonism and other philosophical traditions. He was also acquainted with the Ismaili-connected *Rasa'il* (*Epistles*) of the Ikhwan al-Safa' (Brethren of Purity). The *Rawdat al-taslim*, containing elaborate discourses on creation, cosmology, eschatology, ethics, prophetology, imamology, and human relations, draws on many Ismaili and non-Ismaili sources and traditions. However, al-Tusi used his sources creatively and made original contributions to Ismaili thought of his time. Indeed, it is mainly on the basis of the corpus of Ismaili texts attributed to al-Tusi that modern scholars are now beginning to acquire a better understanding of the complex doctrines and policies of the Nizari Ismailis of the Alamut period, even though al-Tusi's sojourn among them represented but a transitory but significant phase in his own intellectual life and eventful career.

Notes

* This chapter originally appeared as 'Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and the Ismailis of the Alamut Period', in N. Pourjavady and Ž. Vesel, ed., *Nasir al-Din Tusi, philosophe et savant de XIII*e *siècle* (Tehran, 2000), pp. 59–67.

1. Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah, *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh: qismat -i Ismaʿiliyan va Fatimiyan va Nizariyan va daʿiyan va rafiqan*, ed. M.T. Danishpazhuh and M.

Mudarrisi Zanjani (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), pp. 189–190, and Abu'l-Qasim ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAli Kashani, *Zubdat al-tawarikh: bakhsh-i Fatimiyan va Nizariyan*, ed. M. T. Danishpazhuh (2nd ed., Tehran, 1366 Sh./1987), pp. 227–228.

2. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi composed an account of Hulagu's conquest of Baghdad which has survived as the continuation of the history of the Mongol conquests compiled by Juwayni who was in the service of Hulagu; see ʿAla' al-Din ʿAta-Malik Juwayni, *Ta'rikh-i jahan-gusha*, ed. M. Qazwini (Leiden and London, 1912–37), vol. 3, pp. 278–292.

3. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, ed. M. Minuvi and ʿA. Haydari (Tehran, 1360 Sh./1981); English trans., G.M. Wickens as *The Nasirean Ethics* (London, 1964).

4. See E.G. Browne, *A Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1896), pp. 205–207; Jalal al-Din Huma'i, 'Muqaddima-yi qadim-i Akhlaq-i Nasiri', *Majalla-yi Danishkada-yi Adabiyyat, Danishgah-i Tehran*, 3 (1335 Sh./1956), pp. 17–25, and M. Mudarrisi Zanjani, *Sargudhasht va ʿaqa'id-i falsafi-yi Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi* (Tehran, 1335 Sh./ 1956), pp. 125–129. See also M.T. Danishpazhuh's introductory remarks to his edition of al- Tusi's *Risala-yi Muʿiniyya* (Tehran, 1335 Sh./1956), explaining that this work's original Ismaili preamble, too, was later changed to omit praises of the Nizari Nasir al-Din and his son.

5. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Sayr va suluk*, in his *Majmuʿa-yi rasa'il*, ed. M. T. Mudarris Radavi (Tehran, 1335 Sh./1956), pp. 36–55; ed. and English trans. S.J. Badakhchani under the title of *Contemplation and Action: The Spiritual Autobiography of a Muslim Scholar* (London, 1998).

6. See W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963), pp. 134–136; I.K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismaʿili Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977), pp. 260–263, and F. Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London, 2004), pp. 157–159. See also M.T. Danishpazhuh, 'Guftari az Khwaja-yi Tusi bi ravish-i Batiniyan', *Majalla-yi Danishkada-yi Adabiyyat*, *Danishgah-i Tehran,* 3 (1335 Sh./1956), pp. 82–88, and H. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, tr. L. Sherrard (London, 1993), pp. 96, 319 ff., 326–327.

7. See, for instance, al-Qadi Nur Allah al-Shushtari, *Majalis al-mu'minin* (Tehran, 1375/1955), vol. 2, pp. 201–207, and Muhammad Baqir al-Khwansari, *Rawdat al-jannat* (Tehran, 1360 Sh./1981), vol. 6, pp. 221–222.

8. M.T. Mudarris Radavi, *Ahval va athar-i Abu Jaʿfar Muhammad b. Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Tusi* (2nd ed., Tehran, 1354 Sh./1975), pp. 3–16, 83–93, and Mudarrisi Zanjani, *Sargudhasht*, pp. 27–34, 54–56.

9. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Sharh al-isharat* (Qumm, 1404/1983), vol. 2, p. 145.

10. See Minuvi's introduction to the *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, pp. 14–32; M.T. Danishpazhuh's introduction to his edition of al-Tusi's *Akhlaq-i muhtashami* (2nd ed., Tehran, 1361 Sh./1982), pp. 9–11, 20, and F. Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 408–411, 423–424.

11. W. Madelung, 'Nasir ad-Din Tusi's Ethics Between Philosophy, Shi'ism, and Sufism', in R.G. Hovannisian, ed., *Ethics in Islam* (Malibu, CA, 1985), pp. 85–101.

12. H. Dabashi, 'The Philosopher/Vizier: Khwaja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and the Isma'ilis', in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 231–245.

13. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Rawdat al-taslim*, ed. and English trans. W. Ivanow (Leiden, 1950); French trans. Christian Jambet under the title of *La Convocation d'Alamût. Somme de philosophie Ismaélienne* (Lagrasse, 1996). An improved edition of the Persian text of this treatise, based on the oldest known manuscript of the work dated 968/1560 and other manuscripts, is to be found in S. Jalal H. Badakhchani, 'The Paradise of Submission: A Critical Edition and Study of Rawzeh-i Taslim commonly known as Tasawwurat' (D. Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1989), pp. 271–421. A critical edition of this text together with its complete English translation has now been undertaken by S.J. Badakhchani under the title of *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought* (London, 2005).

14. Abu'l-Fath Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-milal wa'l-nihal*, ed. W. Cureton (London, 1842–46), pp. 150–152; ed. 'A.M. al-Wakil (Cairo, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 195–198; partial English trans. A. K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn as *Muslim Sects and Divisions* (London, 1984), pp. 167–170; also in Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* (The Hague, 1955), pp. 325–328; French trans. D. Gimaret et al. as *Livre des religions et des sectes* (Louvain, 1986–93), vol. 1, pp. 560–565. See also Hodgson, *Order*, pp. 51–61, and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 367–370.

15. Juwayni, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, pp. 195–199; English trans. John A. Boyle as *The History of the World- Conqueror* (Manchester, 1958), vol. 2, pp. 671–673; Rashid al-Din, *Jami' al-tawarikh*, pp. 105–107, and Kashani, *Zubdat al-tawarikh*, pp. 142–143.

16. Al-Tusi's *Masari' al-musari'*, together with al-Shahrastani's *Musara'a*, ed. Shaykh Hasan Mu'izzi (Qumm, 1405/1984). Al-Tusi's work is also edited by W. Madelung (Tehran, 1383 Sh./2004). A critical edition and complete English translation of al-Shahrastani's *Kitab al-musara'a* has been produced by W. Madelung and T. Mayer as *Struggling with the Philosopher: A Refutation of Avicenna's Metaphysics* (London, 2001). See also W. Madelung's 'Aš-Šahrastanis

Streitschrift gegen Avicenna und ihre Widerlegung durch Nasir ad-Din at-Tusi', in his *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London, 1985), article XVI.

17. Juwayni, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, pp. 222–239; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 686–697; Rashid al-Din, *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh*, pp. 162–170; Kashani, *Zubdat al-tawarikh*, pp. 198–208; Hodgson, *Order*, pp. 146–159, and Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis*, pp. 385–391. The doctrine of *qiyama*, as expounded fully under Hasan II's son and successor, Nur al-Din Muhammad (561–607/1166–1210), is contained in the anonymous Nizari treatise entitled *Haft bab-i Baba Sayyidna*, ed. W. Ivanow, in his *Two Early Ismaili Treatises* (Bombay, 1933), pp. 4–42; English trans. in Hodgson, *Order*, pp. 279–324. For modern expositions of this doctrine, see Hodgson, *Order*, pp. 160–180; Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis*, pp. 391–396, and Christian Jambet's phenomenological account in his *La grande résurrection d'Alamût* (Lagrasse, 1990).

18. Al-Tusi, *Rawdat al-taslim*, ed. and tr. Ivanow, text pp. 61, 110, translation pp.67–68, 126; ed. and tr. Badakhchani, text pp. 80, 146, translation pp. 69, 118–119; tr. Jambet, pp. 214, 290–291.

10

Ismaili-Sufi Relations in Post-Alamut Persia

Modern scholarship in Ismaili studies has now succeeded in shedding light on all the major phases in the history of the Ismailis and their diverse literary and intellectual traditions of learning.* Nevertheless, aspects of Ismaili history and thought continue to be shrouded in mystery due to lack of reliable sources of information. Of the obscure periods in Ismaili history, one of the foremost relates to the first five centuries following the fall of the Nizari Ismaili state in 654/1256, a period which partially overlapped with Safawid rule (907/1501–1135/1722) over Persia. It was precisely during the earliest centuries of this post-Alamut period that relations of a particular kind developed in Persia between Ismailism and Sufism. The purpose of this chapter is to convey a brief overview of the background and the nature of these Ismaili-Sufi relations on the basis of the fragmentary findings of modern scholarship on the subject.

Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 518/1124) founded the independent Nizari Ismaili state, centred at the mountain fortress of Alamut in northern Persia, in the midst of Saljuq dominions. Despite the incessant hostilities of the Saljuqs and their successor dynasties, the Nizari Ismaili state in Persia survived for 166 years until it was destroyed by the all-conquering Mongol hordes in 654/1256.[1]

The Mongols demolished Alamut and its famous library as well as the other major Ismaili fortresses of Persia. They also massacred large numbers of Ismailis in both northern Persia and in Khurasan. Contrary to the claims of Juwayni,[2] who had accompanied the Mongol conqueror Hulagu on his campaigns against the Persian Ismailis,

and other Persian historians of the Ilkhanid period, however, the Persian Ismailis survived the destruction of their state and mountain strongholds. In the aftermath of the Mongol debacle, which permanently ended the political prominence of the Ismailis, the Ismaili community became disorganized. Many of those who had survived the Mongol swords migrated to Badakhshan in Central Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, where Ismaili communities already existed. Those who remained in Persia now began a new phase of their history, living clandestinely outside their traditional fortress communities. Moreover, they were once again obliged to strictly practise the Shiʿi principle of *taqiyya*, or precautionary dissimulation, which had become an integral part of Ismaili teachings.

With the exception of the Fatimid period, when Ismailism was adopted as the *madhhab* or system of jurisprudence for the Fatimid state and enjoyed protection of that state, the Ismailis had by and large been persecuted throughout the Muslim world. As a result, from early on in their history during the 3rd/9th century, the Ismailis had made extensive use of *taqiyya*, concealing their true religious beliefs to safeguard themselves under hostile circumstances. Indeed, the Ismailis, like the Ithnaʿasharis or Twelver Shiʿis with whom they shared the same early Imami heritage, including the observance of *taqiyya*, had become rather experienced in adopting different external guises as required. For a while during the Alamut period, for instance, the Persian Ismailis had even adopted the *shariʿa* in its Sunni form. Be that as it may, in the aftermath of the fall of Alamut, the Persian Ismailis once again resorted widely to *taqiyya* in different forms.

Before investigating the early manifestations of the Ismaili use of *taqiyya* in the garb of Sufism, it should be recalled that the disorganization of the Persian Ismaili community of Ilkhanid times was all the more aggravated by the fact that the Ismailis had now also been deprived of the central leadership that they had previously enjoyed during the Alamut period. After the initial leadership of Hasan-i Sabbath and his next two successors at Alamut, who acted as *daʿi*s and *hujja*s of the then inaccessible Nizari Ismaili imams, the imams themselves had emerged from their concealment to take charge of the affairs of their state, *daʿwa* and community. According to Nizari traditions, Shams al-Din Muhammad, the son and designated

successor of the last ruler of Alamut, Rukn al-Din Khurshah (d. 655/1257), had been hidden by some Ismaili dignitaries who in due course took him to Adharbayjan. Shams al-Din Muhammad and his immediate successors seem to have remained in north-western Persia, where they lived secretly, without direct access to their followers who were now scattered in different regions. Shams al-Din, who has been identified in legendary accounts with Shams-i Tabriz, the spiritual guide of the great mystic-poet Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 672/1273), evidently lived secretly as an embroiderer, hence his nickname of Zarduz. On Shams al-Din's death around 710/1310, his succession was disputed by his descendants. As a result, the Nizari Ismaili imamate and community split into the rival Qasim-Shahi and Muhammad-Shahi branches.[3] Lack of evidence does not permit us to differentiate adequately and accurately between these two Nizari Ismaili communities of Persia during the early post-Alamut centuries; hence our discussion for those centuries may be taken to hold true for both communities. But for the Safawid period, unless specified otherwise, our references are to the Qasim-Shahi branch, which eventually emerged as the predominant one in Persia and elsewhere. The Muhammad-Shahi line of Nizari imams was actually transferred to India during the early decades of the 10th/16th century, and by the end of the 12th/18th century this line had become discontinued.

It was in Mongol Persia that the Nizari Ismailis began to use, under obscure circumstances, poetic and Sufi forms of expressions. It should be recalled here that from the time of Hasan-i Sabbah Persian had been adopted, in preference to Arabic, as the religious language of the Persian-speaking Ismailis. This explains why the literature produced during the Alamut and post-Alamut periods by the Ismailis of Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia was entirely in the Persian language. In time, this commonality of language made Ismaili-Sufi literary encounters all the more readily possible in Persia. Nizari Quhistani, a Persian Ismaili poet who was born in Birjand in 645/1247 and died there in 720/1320, seems to have been the earliest Nizari author of this period to have chosen the verse and Sufi forms of expressions for camouflaging his Ismaili ideas, a model emulated by later Ismaili authors in Persia. Nizari Quhistani, in fact, served the Sunni Kart rulers of Harat and was obliged to panegyrize them

in many of his *qasida*s. Nizari Quhistani travelled extensively, and certain allusions in his versified *Safar-nama* (*Travelogue*), written in *mathnawi* form and containing about 1,200 verses, indicate that he actually saw the Ismaili imam of the time, Shams al-Din Muhammad, in Adharbayjan around 679/1280.[4]

During the earliest post-Alamut centuries, the Persian Nizaris increasingly disguised themselves under the mantle of Sufism, without establishing formal affiliations with any one of the Sufi orders or *tariqa*s which were then spreading in Persia. The origins and early development of this curious phenomenon remain very obscure. However, modern studies of the meagre literary works of the Nizaris of Persia and Central Asia dating to the early post-Alamut period have clearly revealed that Nizari Ismailism did become increasingly infused in pre-Safawid Persia with Sufi terminology. At the same time, the Sufis themselves used the Ismaili-related *batini ta'wil* methodology, or esoteric exegesis, also adopting certain ideas which had been more widely ascribed to the Ismailis. Indeed, a coalescence had now emerged in pre-Safawid Persia between Persian Sufism and Nizari Ismailism, which represented two independent esoteric traditions in Islam. It is owing to this Ismaili-Sufi coalescence, still even less understood from the Sufi side, that it is often difficult to ascertain whether a certain post-Alamut Persian treatise was written by a Nizari author influenced by Sufism, or whether it was produced in Sufi milieus exposed to Ismailism.[5] As an early instance of this peculiar interaction, mention may be made of the celebrated Sufi treatise *Gulshan-i raz* (*The Rose-Garden of Mystery*) composed by Nizari Quhistani's contemporary Mahmud Shabistari (d. after 740/1339–40), and its later commentary by an anonymous Nizari Ismaili author.[6] A relatively obscure Sufi master, Mahmud Shabistari produced his *Gulshan-i raz*, a *mathnawi* containing some one thousand couplets, in reply to questions raised about Sufi teachings, and it clearly shows its author's familiarity with certain Ismaili doctrines. Many commentaries have been written on the *Gulshan-i raz*. In fact, the Ismailis of Persia and Central Asia generally consider this treatise as belonging to their own literature, which may also explain why the *Gulshan-i raz* was later commented upon in Persian by a Nizari author. The authorship of this commentary, which comprises Ismaili interpretations of

selected passages, may possibly be attributed to Shah Tahir, the most famous imam of the Muhammad-Shahi Nizaris who did in fact write a treatise entitled *Sharh-i Gulshan-i raz*.

As a result of the same Ismaili-Sufi interactions of the post-Alamut times, the Persian-speaking Ismailis have regarded some of the greatest mystic-poets of Persia as their co-religionists and selections of their *divan*s have been preserved particularly in the private Ismaili libraries of Badakhshan, now divided between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Amongst such poets, mention may be made of Farid al-Din ʿAttar (d. ca. 627/1230) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 672/1273), as well as lesser figures like Qasim al-Anwar (d. ca. 837/1433). Similarly, the Nizaris of Central Asia consider ʿAziz al- Din Nasafi (d. ca. 661/1262), the celebrated Sufi master of their region, as a co-religionist and they have numerous copies of his Sufi treatise entitled *Zubdat al-haqa'iq* in their collections of manuscripts.[7] The Ismailis of Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia, all belonging to the Nizari branch of Ismailism, have continued to use verses by the mystical poets of Persia in their various religious rituals and ceremonies, which often also resemble Sufi *dhikr*s or incantations; the origins of such traditions, too, may be traced to the Ismaili-Sufi encounters of post-Alamut centuries.

By the 9th/15th century, the Persian Ismailis had begun to adopt Sufi ways of life even externally. Thus, the Ismaili imams, who were still obliged to hide their true identity, now appeared as Sufi masters or *pir*s, while their followers adopted the typically Sufi guise of their disciples or *murid*s. The adoption of a Sufi exterior, and indeed the Persian Ismailis' success in seeking refuge under the general mantle of Sufism, would not have been so easily possible if these two esoteric traditions of Islam did not share common intellectual and spiritual grounds. The Ismailis, too, had from early on developed their own *batini* tradition based on a fundamental distinction between the exoteric (*zahir*) and the esoteric (*batin*) dimensions of religion, or between the apparent, literal meaning and the inner, true significance of the sacred scriptures and the religious commandments and prohibitions. Accordingly, they held that every revealed scripture, including especially the Qur'an, and the laws or *shari'a*s laid down by them, had its literal meaning, the *zahir*, which had to be distinguished from its inner meaning or true spiritual reality contained in the *batin*. They

further held that the *zahir*, or religious laws enunciated by prophets, had undergone periodical changes, while the spiritual truths (*haqa'iq*) would remain immutable and eternal. These hidden truths, or *haqa'iq*, could be made apparent through *ta'wil* (esoteric exegesis), the process of deducing the *batin* from the *zahir*. The Ismailis further held that in every era, the esoteric world of spiritual reality could be accessible only to the elite (*khawass*) of humankind, as distinct from the common masses (*'awamm*) who were merely capable of perceiving and understanding the *zahir*, the literal meaning of the revelation. Accordingly, in the era of Islam, initiated by the Prophet Muhammad, the eternal truths of religion could be explained only to those who had been properly initiated into the Ismaili community and recognized the teaching authority of the Ismaili imams who succeeded the Prophet and his *wasi*, 'Ali b. Abi Talib; for they alone represented the true sources of *ta'wil* in the era of Islam.

Initiation into Ismailism took place gradually, and the initiates were bound by their oath (*'ahd*) to keep secret the *batin* imparted to them by the imam or the hierarchy of teachers authorized by him. The *batin* was thus not only hidden but also secret, and its knowledge had to be kept away from the uninitiated common people, the non-Ismailis. By exalting the *batin* and the *haqa'iq* contained therein, the Ismailis were from early on designated by the rest of the Muslim society as the Batiniyya, the most representative Shi'i community expounding esotericism in Islam. However, this designation was often used abusively by anti-Ismaili sources which accused the Ismailis in general of ignoring the *zahir*, or the commandments and prohibitions of Islam, in a way similar to the general condemnation of Sufis by Muslim jurists.

During the Alamut period, with the declaration of the *qiyama* or Resurrection in 559/1164, which was subsequently developed in terms of a spiritual doctrine and incorporated into the contemporary Nizari Ismaili teachings, greater affinities were established between the Ismailis and the Sufis. The Nizari Ismaili doctrine of the *qiyama* thus prepared the ground even further for the coalescence that was to develop between these two esoteric traditions in post-Alamut times.[8] This doctrine exalted the autonomous teaching authority of the current Ismaili imam over that of any previous imam, while the

declaration of the *qiyama* also implied a complete personal transformation of the Nizari Ismailis. In the spiritual paradise of the *qiyama* into which the Nizaris had been collectively admitted, the imam had to be seen in his true spiritual reality. As a result, one would be able to lead a totally spiritual life, a paradisal existence accessible only to the Nizari Ismailis who acknowledged the spiritual guidance of the sole legitimate imam of the time.

This viewpoint towards the universe, and the imam, would further lead the individual to a third deeper level of being, a world of *batin* behind the *batin*, the ultimate reality or *haqiqa*. In the realm of the *haqiqa*, believers would turn from the *zahiri* world of appearances to the spiritual realm of the ultimate reality and unchangeable truths. On that level of existence, they would lead an entirely inward spiritual life. In the Nizari Ismaili teachings of the Alamut period, the *qiyama* was thus identified with the *haqiqa*, a realm of spiritual life, in close analogy to the *haqiqa* of the Sufi inner experience. However, the Nizari Ismaili imam was more than a mere Sufi master, one among a multitude of such guides. The imam was a single cosmic individual who summed up in his person the entire reality of existence (*wujud*); the perfect microcosm, for whom a lesser guide, or a Sufi *pir*, could not be substituted. The cosmic position of the Ismaili imam, as the earthly representative (*mazhar*) of divine reality, was also analogous to that of the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) of the Sufis, though again the latter could not offer a full equivalent of the Nizari Ismaili imam.

Meanwhile, certain developments in the religio-political ambience of post Mongol Persia were facilitating the activities of the Nizaris and other Shiʿi movements as well as the general Ismaili-Sufi relations. Ilkhanid rule, founded by Hulagu in 654/1256, the same year in which he destroyed the Ismaili state, was effectively ended in Persia with Abu Saʿid (716–736/1316–1335), the last great ruler of that Mongol dynasty. Subsequently, Persia became politically fragmented, with the major exceptions of the reigns of Timur (771–807/1370–1405), and that of his son Shah Rukh (807–850/1405–1447). During this turbulent period, lasting until the advent of the Safawids, different parts of Persia were held by local dynasties, including the minor Ilkhanids, the Muzaffarids, the Jalayirids, the Sarbadarids, the later Timurids, the Qara Qoyunlu and the Aq Qoyunlu. In the absence

of any strong central authority, the political fragmentation of Persia between the collapse of the Ilkhanid empire and the establishment of the Safawid dynasty provided more favourable conditions for the activities of a number of movements, most of which were essentially Shiʿi or influenced by Shiʿism. The Nizaris and certain Shiʿi-related movements with millenarian aspirations, such as those of the Sarbadarids, the Hurufiyya and the Mushaʿshaʿ, as well as certain Sufi orders, found a suitable respite in post-Mongol Persia to organize or reorganize themselves during the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries. It was under such circumstances that the Nizari imams, as we shall note, emerged more openly at Anjudan in central Persia, though still hiding their identity.

The same political atmosphere had been conducive to a rising tide of Shiʿi tendencies in Persia during the two centuries preceding the advent of the Safawids. This phenomenon, too, had rendered Persia's religious environment increasingly eclectic and more favourable to the activities of the Nizaris and other crypto-Shiʿi or Shiʿi-related movements. Some of these movements, especially the radical ones with political agendas which normally also possessed millenarian or Mahdist aspirations like those of the Hurufiyya and their Nuqtawi or Pisikhani offshoot, proved extremely popular. It is noteworthy that leaders of the majority of such movements in post-Mongol Persia hailed from Shiʿi-Sufi backgrounds. However, the Shiʿism that was then spreading in Persia was of a new form, of a popular type and propagated mainly through the teachings and organizations of the Sufis, rather than being promulgated by Twelver or any other particular school of Shiʿism. This popular Shiʿism spread mainly through several Sufi orders, hence its designation as '*tariqah* Shiʿism' by Marshall Hodgson.[9] It is significant to recall that most of the Sufi orders in question, those founded during the early post-Alamut period, remained outwardly Sunni for quite some time. However, they were at the same time devoted to ʿAli and the *ahl al-bayt*, acknowledging ʿAli's spiritual guidance and including him in their *silsila*s or chains of spiritual masters. All this led to a unique synthesis of Sunni-centred Sufism and ʿAlid loyalism.

Among the Sufi orders that played a leading role in spreading pro-ʿAlid sentiments and Shiʿism in Persia, mention should be made of the

Nurbakhshiyya, the Niʿmat Allahiyya, and the Safawiyya *tariqa*s. All three orders eventually became fully Shiʿi. The Safawi *tariqa* played the most direct part in the 'Shiʿitization' of Persia; it was indeed the leader of this order who ascended the throne of Persia in 907/1501 and at the same time adopted Ithnaʿashari Imami Shiʿism as the state religion of his realm. In this atmosphere of religious eclecticism, the ʿAlid loyalism of certain Sufi orders and religio-political movements came to be gradually more widespread. As a result, Shiʿi elements began, in a unique sense, to be superimposed on Sunni Islam. By the 9th/15th century, there had appeared a general increase in Shiʿi and pro-ʿAlid sentiments throughout Persia, where the bulk of the population still remained Sunni. Professor Claude Cahen (1909–1991) has referred to this curious process as the 'Shiʿitization of Sunnism', as opposed to the propagation of Shiʿism of any specific school.[10] At any rate, it was in such an ambience of pre-Safawid Persia, characterized by *tariqa*-diffused Shiʿi-Sunni syncretism, that the Nizari Ismailis found it convenient to seek refuge under the 'politically correct' mantle of Sufism, with which they also shared many esoteric ideas.

Meanwhile, Twelver Shiʿism had been developing its own relations with Sufism in pre-Safawid Persia.[11] The earliest instance of this non-Ismaili Shiʿi-Sufi rapport is reflected in the writings of Sayyid Haydar Amuli, the eminent Ithnaʿashari theologian, theosopher and gnostic (*ʿarif*) from Mazandaran who died after 787/1385. Strongly influenced by the teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 638/1240), whom the Nizaris consider as another of their co-religionists, Haydar Amuli combined his Shiʿi thought with certain gnostic-mystical traditions, as well as theosophy (Persian, *hikmat-i ilahi*), also emphasizing the common grounds between Shiʿism and Sufism. According to Amuli, a Muslim who combines the *shariʿa* with *haqiqa* and *tariqa* (the spiritual path followed by Sufis) is not only a believer but a believer put to test (*al-muʾmin al-mumtahan*). Such a Muslim, who is at once a true Shiʿi and a Sufi, would preserve a careful balance between the *zahir* and the *batin*, equally avoiding the excessive literalist, judicial interpretations of Islam and the antinomian stances of the radical *ghulat* Muslims.[12] Aspects of this fusion between Twelver Shiʿism and mysticism, or rather gnosis (*ʿirfan*) – in combination with different philosophical (theosophical) traditions, later culminated in the Safawid period in

the works of Mir Damad (d. 1040/1630), Mulla Sadra (d.1050/1640) and other members of the Shiʿi gnostic-theosophical 'School of Isfahan'. It should be added that with the Safawid persecutions of Sufi orders, the proponents of the mystical experience began to use the term *ʿirfan* in preference to Sufism (*tasawwuf*).

No details are available on the activities of the Nizari Ismaili imams succeeding Shams al-Din Muhammad until the middle of 9th/15th century, when they emerged at Anjudan in the guise of Sufi *pir*s. Islam Shah, the thirtieth imam, who was a contemporary of Timur and died around 829/1425, may have been the first imam of the Qasim-Shahi Nizari line to have settled in Anjudan. In fact, the Persian chroniclers of Timur's reign do refer to earlier Nizari activities in Anjudan, also mentioning a Timurid expedition sent against them in 795/1393.[13] It is, however, with Mustansir bi'llah, the thirty-second imam of this line who succeeded to the imamate around 868/1463, that the Qasim-Shahi imams were definitely established at Anjudan, initiating what W. Ivanow (1886–1970), the foremost pioneer in modern Nizari studies, designated as the Anjudan period in post-Alamut Nizari Ismailism.[14] Anjudan, situated 37 kilometres east of Arak and the same distance westward from Mahallat in central Persia, remained the seat of the Qasim-Shahi Nizari imams and their *daʿwa* activities until the end of the 11th/17th century, a period of more than two centuries, coinciding with the greater part of the Safawid period. It seems that the imams had chosen Anjudan rather carefully: not only did the locality have a central position in Persia while still being removed from the main centres of Sunni power, but it was also close to the cities of Qumm and Kashan, the traditional Shiʿi centres of Persia designated as the *dar al-mu'minin* (abode of the faithful). The Nizari antiquities of Anjudan, discovered in 1937 by Ivanow, include an old mosque and three mausoleums containing the tombs of several imams, with invaluable epigraphic information. The mausoleum of Mustansir bi'llah, who died in 885/1480, is still preserved there under the name of Shah Qalandar, whose Ismaili identity remains completely unknown to the local inhabitants.[15]

The Anjudan period witnessed a revival in the *daʿwa* activities of the Nizari Ismailis. As noted, the general religio-political atmosphere of Persia had now become more favourable for the activities of the

Nizaris and other Shiʿi movements. As a result, with the emergence of the imams at Anjudan, the Nizari *daʿwa* was reorganized and reinvigorated, not only to win new converts but also to reassert the central authority and the direct control of the imams over the various outlying Nizari communities, especially in Central Asia and India where the Nizaris had increasingly come under the authority of a number of hereditary dynasties of local leaders. The Anjudan renaissance in Nizari Ismailism also brought about a revival in the literary activities of the community in Persia. The earliest fruits of these efforts were the works produced by Abu Ishaq Quhistani, who flourished during the second half of the 9th/15th century, and Khayrkhwah-i Harati, a *daʿi* and poet who died after 960/1553.[16]

The Nizari imams and their followers were still obliged, in predominantly Sunni Persia, to practise *taqiyya* in the guise of Sufism. In the course of the Anjudan period, it became customary for the Nizari Ismaili imams to adopt Sufi names; they often also added, like Sufi masters, terms such as Shah and ʿAli to their names. Mustansir biʾllah, whose own Sufi name was Shah Qalandar, may even have developed close relations with the Niʿmat Allahi Sufi order, though concrete evidence is lacking. At any rate, the Persian Nizari Ismailis now clearly appeared as a Sufi *tariqa*, one among many such orders then existing in pre-Safawid Persia. For this purpose, the Persian Ismailis had readily adopted the master-disciple (*murshid-murid*) terminology of the Sufis. To outsiders, the Nizari imams at Anjudan appeared as Sufi *murshid*s, *pir*s, or *shaykh*s. They were evidently also regarded as pious Fatimid ʿAlid Sayyids, descendants of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima and ʿAli. Similarly, ordinary Nizaris posed as the imams' *murid*s, who were guided along a spiritual path or *tariqa* to *haqiqa* by a spiritual master. With Shiʿi ideas and ʿAlid loyalism then spreading in so many Sufi orders in Persia, the veneration of ʿAli and other early ʿAlid imams by Nizaris did not by themselves reveal the true identity of this Shiʿi community. It is interesting to note that the Nizaris of today continue to refer to themselves as their imam's *murid*s, while the word *tariqa* is used by them in reference to the Ismaili interpretation of Islam.

An extremely important book entitled *Pandiyat-i javanmardi* (*Admonitions on Spiritual Chivalry*), containing the sermons or

religious admonitions of Imam Mustansir bi'llah, has survived from the early Anjudan period.[17] Copies of the Persian version of the *Pandiyat*, which is also extant in a medieval Gujarati translation, are still preserved in the manuscript collections of the Ismailis of Badakhshan and adjacent regions, including Hunza and other areas of northern Pakistan. In the *Pandiyat*, the Nizaris are referred to by Sufi expressions such as *ahl-i haqq* and *ahl-i haqiqat*, or 'the people of the truth', while the imam himself is designated as *pir*, *murshid* and *qutb*.[18] The *Pandiyat* is indeed permeated with Sufi ideas; the imam's admonitions start with the *shariʿat-tariqat-haqiqat* categorization of the Sufis, portraying the *haqiqat* as the *batin* of the *shariʿat* which could be attained by the faithful by following the *tariqat*, or spiritual path. In accordance with the Nizari teachings of the time, rooted in the doctrine of the *qiyamat* of the Alamut period, the *Pandiyat* further explains that the *haqiqat* essentially consists of recognizing the spiritual reality of the current imam. The *Pandiyat* also stresses the duty of the faithful to recognize and obey the current imam, and to pay their religious dues regularly to him. These admonitions are reiterated in the writings of Khayrkhwah-i Harati. By his time (the middle of the 10th/16th century), the term *pir*, the Persian equivalent of the Arabic *shaykh* had acquired widespread Ismaili application and was used in reference to the person of the imam as well as *daʿi*s of different ranks. Subsequently, the term *pir* fell into disuse in Persia, but it was retained by the Nizari Ismailis of Central and South Asia.

In the meantime, the advent of the Safawids and the proclamation of Twelver Shiʿism as the religion of Safawid Persia in 907/1501 promised yet more favourable circumstances for the activities of the Nizaris and other Persian Shiʿi communities. The Nizaris did, in fact, reduce the intensity of their *taqiyya* practices during the initial decades of Safawid rule. As a result, the religious identity of the Nizari imams and their followers became somewhat better known despite their continued use of the *murshid-murid* and other Sufi guises. The new optimism of the Persian Ismailis proved short-lived, however, as the Safawids and their *shariʿa*-minded *ʿulama* soon adopted a rigorous religio-political policy aimed at suppressing popular forms of Sufism as well as all the Shiʿi or Shiʿi-related communities which fell outside the boundaries of Twelver Shiʿism.[19] This policy was even directed

against the Qizilbash who had brought the Safawids to power. Most of the Sufi orders of Persia were in fact extirpated in the reign of Shah Ismaʿil (907–930/1501–1524), who also widely persecuted various non-Ithnaʿashari Shiʿis.

The Nizaris, whose increasingly overt activities had attracted the attention of Shah Ismaʿil and his successor, Shah Tahmasp (930–984/1524–1576), as well as their Twelver *ʿulama*, received their share of the Safawids' early religious persecutions. At the instigation of his *ʿulama,* Shah Ismaʿil eventually issued an order for the execution of Shah Tahir al-Husayni, the thirty-first imam of the Muhammad-Shahi Nizaris. Later, in 981/1574, Shah Tahmasp persecuted the Qasim-Shahi Nizaris of Anjudan in the time of their thirty-sixth imam, Murad Mirza. This imam who pursued a relatively active policy, possibly in collaboration with the Nuqtawis who were severely persecuted under the Safawids, was eventually captured and brought before Shah Tahmasp, who had him executed.[20]

It was under such circumstances that the Persian Nizaris adopted a new form of *taqiyya*, dissimulating under the cover of Twelver Shiʿism, the 'politically correct' form of Shiʿism sponsored and actively championed by the Safawids. At the time, the Safawids were in fact relying on the efforts of a number of Twelver *ʿulama* brought from Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East to propagate Twelver Shiʿism throughout their dominions. The Nizaris found it relatively easy to practise this new form of *taqiyya* as they shared the same early ʿAlid heritage and Imami Shiʿi traditions with the Twelver Shiʿa. The available evidence indicates that Shah Tahir, who succeeded to the imamate of the Muhammad-Shahi Nizaris shortly after the foundation of the Safawid state, may indeed have been the earliest Nizari leader to have initiated the Twelver Shiʿi disguise, which remained operative within the Persian Nizari community until the early decades of the 20th century. Dissimulating as Twelver Shiʿis did by and large safeguard the Nizaris against rampant persecution by the Safawids and their successors in Persia, but its extended application also led to the acculturation of numerous Nizari groups and their gradual assimilation into the dominant Twelver communities of their surroundings. In other words, the adoption of Twelver Shiʿism eventually led, after several centuries of dissimulation, to the loss of

the specific religious identity of a not insignificant number of Persian Nizari Ismailis who, in fact, became actually Twelver Shiʿis.

Shah Tahir al-Husayni had succeeded in 915/1509 to the imamate of the Muhammad-Shahi Nizaris on the death of his father, Shah Radi al-Din II, the thirtieth imam. The most famous imam of his line, Shah Tahir was a learned theologian, poet and stylist as well as an accomplished diplomat who rendered valuable services to the Nizam-Shahi dynasty of Ahmadnagar in the Deccan, in southern India; hence his nickname of al-Dakkani. The most detailed account of Shah Tahir is related by Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Astarabadi, the celebrated historian of the Deccan, in his *Gulshan-i Ibrahimi*, commonly known as *Taʾrikh-i Firishta* after the pen-name of its author.[21] Firishta, who completed his history around 1015/1606, was evidently in contact with Shah Tahir's descendants and was also aware of their Ismaili affiliation.

It seems that Shah Tahir had presented himself as a Twelver Shiʿi from early on, perhaps even before he succeeded to the Muhammad-Shahi imamate. At any rate, as a reflection of his *taqiyya* practices, Shah Tahir, in the course of his eventful life, composed a number of commentaries on the theological and juristic treatises of well-known Twelver Imami scholars such as ʿAllama al-Hilli (d. 726/1325).[22] Owing to his learning and piety, Shah Tahir was invited in 920/1514 by Shah Ismaʿil to join other Shiʿi scholars at the Safawid court in Sultaniyya, in Adharbayjan. Under obscure circumstances, Shah Tahir soon aroused the anger of the Safawid monarch, perhaps because his teachings reportedly deviated from those of other *ʿulama*. At any rate, on the intercession of Mirza Husayn Isfahani, an influential Safawid courtier who may have been a secret follower of Shah Tahir, he was permitted to settle in Kashan, which was like Qumm a traditional centre of Shiʿi learning in Persia, and teach at a theological seminary there.

Before long, Shah Tahir's Twelver cover was seriously threatened as countless numbers from amongst his own followers (*murid*s), as well as Nuqtawis and others, swarmed to his lectures from different localities. Firishta and other sources relate that Shah Tahir's rising popularity in Kashan soon aroused the jealousy of the local officials and Twelver scholars, who complained to Shah Ismaʿil about his

'heretical' teachings. Whether or not Shah Tahir propagated some form of Ismaili doctrine in his lectures cannot be ascertained. Be that as it may, Shah Tahir's Ismaili connection had now been discovered and reported to the Safawid monarch, who speedily ordered his execution. The imam was once again saved by his friend at the court, Mirza Husayn Isfahani, who secretly informed him in time to leave the Safawid dominions. In 926/1520, Shah Tahir hurriedly left Kashan for Fars and then sailed to the port of Goa in India. Initially, he proceeded to Bijapur, in the Deccan, hoping to find a suitable position there at the court of Isma'il 'Adil Shah (916–941/1510–1534), whose father had been the first Muslim ruler in India to have adopted Shi'ism as the religion of his state. Disappointed with his poor reception in Bijapur, however, Shah Tahir then encountered and impressed some scholars and dignitaries from the court of Burhan Nizam Shah (914–961/1508–1554), who duly invited the Persian scholar to join his entourage.

In 928/1522, Shah Tahir, who now very closely guarded his Ismaili identity, arrived in Ahmadnagar, the capital of the Nizam-Shahi dynasty in the Deccan, where he was to spend the rest of his life. Soon, he became the most trusted adviser and confidant of Burhan Nizam Shah. By this time, Shah Tahir had been extremely successful in dissimulating as a Twelver Shi'i scholar, and as such he delivered weekly lectures on different religious subjects inside the fort of Ahmadnagar. Shah Tahir's success in disguising his true religious identity culminated in his conversion of Burhan Nizam Shah from Sunnism to Twelver Shi'ism, which also enabled the Deccani monarch to cultivate friendly relations with Safawid Persia. Shortly after his own conversion, in 944/1537 Burhan Nizam Shah adopted Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion of his realm. It is not clear whether Shah Tahir ever attempted to propagate any form of Nizari Ismaili doctrines to the Nizam-Shahis and their subjects. In all probability, after his Persian experience, the Nizari imam had decided to adhere fully and publicly to the Twelver form of Shi'ism in the strictest possible observance of *taqiyya*.

Henceforth, an increasing number of Shi'i scholars, including Shah Tahir's own brother Shah Ja'far, were patronized by the Nizam-Shahis to the contentment of the Safawids, who had somehow failed to unmask Shah Tahir's true identity. At any event, Shah Tahmasp, the

second Safawid monarch, sent an embassy and gifts to Burhan Nizam Shah; and the latter reciprocated by despatching Shah Haydar, Shah Tahir's son and future successor, on a goodwill mission to the Safawid court. Subsequently, Shah Tahir rendered great services to the Nizam-Shahis by participating in numerous diplomatic negotiations on their behalf. Shah Tahir died around 956/1549 and his remains were later taken to Karbala and interred in Imam al-Husayn's shrine, in line with a well-established Twelver Shiʿi custom.

The Muhammad-Shahi imamate was handed down in the progeny of Shah Tahir's son, Shah Haydar, who lived in Ahmadnagar for several more generations before settling in Awrangabad. It seems that some eclectic form of Nizari Ismailism, as propagated very secretly under different guises by the Muhammad-Shahi imams, survived for some time with increasing difficulty in India as attested by the versified *Lamaʿat al-tahirin*.[23] This is one of a handful of extant Muhammad-Shahi works composed in 1110/1698 by a certain Ghulam ʿAli b. Muhammad, who eulogizes the imams of the Twelver Shiʿa and also alludes to the imams of the Muhammad-Shahi Nizaris. The author struggles to conceal a number of scattered Ismaili doctrines and concepts under the guises of Twelver Shiʿism and Sufism. This treatise, indeed, represents a curious admixture of teachings from different Shiʿi traditions so much so that its Nizari Ismaili components have become completely marginalized. It is thus safe to assume that after Shah Tahir and Shah Haydar the Muhammad-Shahi imams became increasingly associated in a real sense with Twelver Shiʿism, adopted initially as a tactical disguise, and so they gradually lost their Ismaili heritage and identity. As a result, the Muhammad-Shahi Nizari community too gradually disintegrated or became fully assimilated into the Twelver Shiʿi groups of India, including especially the Ithnaʿashari Khojas. It was under such circumstances that the line of the Muhammad-Shahi imams was discontinued towards the end of the 12th/18th century. The last known imam of this line was Amir Muhammad Baqir, the fortieth in the series, who died around 1210/1796. By then, the Muhammad-Shahi Nizari community too had evidently disappeared completely in India – a phenomenon accentuated by the anti-Shiʿi policies of the Mughal emperor Awrangzib (1068–1118/1658–1707). These developments also explain

why Muhammad-Shahi texts have failed to be preserved. In Persia and Badakhshan, by the 11th/17th century the Muhammad-Shahis had completely lost their position to the Qasim-Shahis who had been more successful than Shah Tahir and his successors in posing as Twelver Shiʿis while secretly retaining and practising their Nizari Ismaili faith.

Meanwhile, in Persia the Safawids had their own dynastic disputes and domestic strifes during the reigns of Ismaʿil II and his successor, Muhammad Khudabanda (985–995/1577–1587), providing a respite for the religious movements that had survived the earlier Safawid persecutions. This proved particularly timely for the Persian Ismailis who by then had already adopted Twelver Shiʿism as a new form of *taqiyya*. By the time of Shah ʿAbbas I (995–1038/1587–1629), who during his long reign led Safawid Persia to its peak of glory, the Persian Nizaris had indeed become very successful in their Twelver guise. Shah ʿAbbas did not persecute the Nizaris and their imams, who had by then even developed friendly relations with the Safawids. Murad Mirza's successor as the thirty-seventh imam at Anjudan, Khalil Allah I, who carried the Sufi name of Dhu'l-Faqar ʿAli, was in fact married to a Safawid princess, possibly a sister of Shah ʿAbbas. The success of the Nizari imams in practising *taqiyya* in the form of Twelver Shiʿism is further attested to by an epigraph, recovered by the present author at Anjudan in 1976. This epigraph, originally attached according to the then prevailing custom to the entrance of an old mosque in Anjudan, reproduces the text of a royal decree issued by Shah ʿAbbas in Rajab 1036/March-April 1627. According to this decree, addressed to Amir Khalil Allah Anjudani, the contemporary Nizari imam, the Shiʿa of Anjudan, cited as a dependency of the *dar al-mu'minin* of Qumm, had received an exemption from paying certain taxes, like other Shiʿa around Qumm. It is significant to note that in this decree the Anjudani Shiʿis and their imam are clearly considered to have been Ithnaʿasharis. Amir Khalil Allah, according to his tombstone in Anjudan, died in 1043/1634; and after him, the Nizari imams in Persia continued to practise *taqiyya* under the double guises of Sufism and Twelver Shiʿism until the end of the Anjudan period, though the Sufi cover seems to have become increasingly overshadowed by that of Twelver Shiʿism.

By the final decades of the 11th/17th century, not only had the Persian Ismailis managed to survive under their double Sufi-Ithnaʿashari guises, but the Nizari Ismaili *daʿwa* had successfully spread in remote regions such as Badakhshan, and in India, where the Nizaris became known as Khojas. In these regions, too, the Nizaris developed their own rapport with Sufism during the Anjudan period. It was in the time of Shah Nizar, the fortieth imam of the Qasim-Shahi Nizaris who succeeded his father Khalil Allah II in 1090/1680, that the seat of this line of imams was transferred from Anjudan to the nearby village of Kahak, bringing to a close the Anjudan period in post-Alamut Nizari Ismailism. Shah Nizar, who according to his tombstone in Kahak died in 1134/1722, the same year in which Safawid rule was effectively brought to an end by the Afghan invasion of Persia, seems to have established relations with the Niʿmat Allahi Sufi order. At any rate, he adopted the Sufi name of ʿAta Allah. This explains why his followers in certain parts of Persia, notably in Kirman, came to be known as ʿAta Allahis.

From the second half of the 12th/18th century, when the Nizari Ismaili imams emerged in Kirman from their clandestine existence and began to play important roles in the political affairs of Persia, they also developed closer relations with the Niʿmat Allahi Sufi order, which was then being revived in Persia by the then *qutb* of the order, Rida ʿAli Shah (d. 1214/1799) who, like his predecessors, resided in the Deccan. But these relations were now no longer cultivated for *taqiyya* purposes. By that time, the identity of the imams had become generally known and they themselves often provided protection for various prominent Niʿmat Allahi Sufis who were then frequently persecuted in Persia. It is, however, beyond the scope of this essay to consider post-Safawid Ismaili-Sufi relations which reached their climax during the long imamate of Hasan ʿAli Shah (1232–1298/1817–1881), the first of the modern Nizari Ismaili imams to bear the title of Agha Khan (Aga Khan).[24]

Notes

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Sufism: Volume III, *Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501–1750) – The Safavid and Mughal Period* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 275–289, and incorporates a few sections from 'Shah Tahir and Nizari Ismaili Disguises', in T. Lawson, ed., *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought, Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt* (London, 2005), pp. 395–406.

1. For an overview of the history of the Nizari Ismaili state during the Alamut period, see M.G.S. Hodgson, 'The Isma'ili State', in *The Cambridge History of Iran:* Volume 5, *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 422–482, and F. Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 324–434.

2. 'Ata-Malik Juwayni, *Ta'rikh-i jahan-gusha*, ed. M. Qazwini (Leiden and London, 1912–37), vol. 3, pp. 277–278; English trans., *The History of the World-Conqueror*, tr. J.A. Boyle (Manchester, 1958), vol. 2, pp. 724–725. This translation has recently been reprinted, with the same continuous pagination in one volume, under the title of *Genghis Khan: The History of the World-Conqueror* (Manchester and Paris, 1997), also containing a new introduction and bibliography by David O. Morgan.

3. On this post-Alamut schism in Nizari Ismailism, see W. Ivanow, 'A Forgotten Branch of the Ismailis', *JRAS* (1938), pp. 57–79.

4. See Hakim Sa'd al-Din Nizari Quhistani, *Divan*, ed. M. Musaffa (Tehran, 1371–73 Sh./1992–94), vol. 1, pp. 105, 109; Chingis G.A. Bayburdi, *Zhizn i tvorchestvo Nizari-Persidskogo poeta* (Moscow, 1966), pp. 158, 162; I.K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Isma'ili Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977), pp. 263–267, and J.T.P. de Bruijn, 'Nizari Kuhistani', *EI2*, vol. 8, pp. 83–84. Now also see Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols: Nizari Quhistani and the Continuity of Ismaili Tradition in Persia* (London, 2002) and L. Lewisohn, 'Sufism and Isma'ili Doctrine in the Persian Poetry of Nizari Quhistani (645–721/1247–1321)', *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 41 (2003), pp. 229–251.

5. See, for instance, W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963), pp. 127–131, and H. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, tr. L. Sherrard (London, 1993), pp. 95, 102–104, 304–306, 326.

6. This anonymous Ismaili commentary entitled *Ba'di az ta'wilat-i Gulshan-i raz* has been edited, with French translation, by H. Corbin in his *Trilogie Ismaélienne* (Tehran and Paris, 1961), text pp. 131–161, translation pp. 1–174. See also W. Ivanow, 'An Ismaili Interpretation of the Gulshani Raz', *JBBRAS*, NS, 8 (1932), pp. 69–78, and Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 274, 351.

7. *Zubdat al-haqa'iq* has been included in a collection of Ismaili works recovered from Badakhshan; see *Panj risala dar bayan-i afaq va anfus*, ed. Andrey E. Bertel's (Moscow, 1970), pp. 91–207, and A.E. Bertel's and M. Bakoev, *Alphabetic Catalogue of Manuscripts found by 1959–1963 Expedition in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region* (Moscow, 1967), pp. 63–64, 81–82.

8. On the controversial Nizari doctrine of the *qiyama* and its implications, see Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 386–396; see also Christian Jambet's *La grande résurrection d'Alamût* (Lagrasse, 1990), which is based on a phenomenological approach to the subject.

9. Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago, 1974), vol. 2, pp. 493ff.

10. Claude Cahen, 'Le problème du Shi'isme dans l'Asie Mineure Turque préottomane', in *Le Shî'isme Imâmite,* ed. T. Fahd (Paris, 1970), pp. 118 ff. See also M. Mole, 'Les Kubrawiya entre Sunnisme et Shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l'hégire', *Revue d'Études Islamiques*, 29(1961), pp. 61–142; S. Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 66–84, and H. Halm, *Shiism*, tr. J. Watson (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 71–83.

11. See H. Corbin, *En Islam Iranien* (Paris, 1971–72), vol. 1, pp. 74–85; vol. 3, pp. 149–213; idem, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 332–335; S.H. Nasr, 'Le Shi'isme et le Soufisme', in *Shî'isme Imâmite*, pp. 215–233, and his *Sufi Essays* (London, 1972), pp. 104–120.

12. Haydar Amuli, *Jami' al-asrar*, ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahya in a collection of Amuli's treatises entitled *La Philosophie Shi'ite* (Tehran and Paris, 1969), pp. 47, 116–117, 216–217, 220–222, 238, 388, 611ff. See also Amuli's *Asrar al-shari'a wa-atwar al-tariqa wa-anwar al-haqiqa*, ed. M. Khwajawi (Tehran, 1982).

13 Nizam al-Din Shami, *Zafar-nama*, ed. F. Tauer (Prague, 1937–56), vol. 1, p. 136, and Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, *Zafar-nama*, ed. M. 'Abbasi (Tehran, 1336 Sh./1957), vol. 1, pp. 443–444; ed. A. Urunbayev (Tashkent, 1972), p. 500.

14. W. Ivanow, *Brief Survey of the Evolution of Ismailism* (Leiden, 1952), p. 29.

15. Ivanow, 'Tombs of Some Persian Ismaili Imams', *JBBRAS*, NS, 14 (1938), pp. 49–62, and F. Daftary, 'Anjedan', *EIR*, vol. 2, p. 77.

16. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature*, pp. 141–144, and Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 269–270, 275–277.

17. Mustansir bi'llah [II], *Pandiyat-i javanmardi*, ed. and tr. W. Ivanow (Leiden, 1953).

18. Ibid., text, pp. 26, 27, 31, 32, 39, 57, 65, 86, 87, 90, 91, 99, translation pp. 7, 17, 19, 20, 24, 36, 40, 53, 54, 55, 56, 61, 62, and elsewhere.

19. For an interesting analysis of this policy, see K. Babayan, 'Sufis, Dervishes

and Mullas: The Controversy over Spiritual and Temporal Domination in Seventeenth-Century Safavid Iran', in Charles Melville, ed., *Safavid Persia* (London, 1996), pp. 117–38. See also Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, pp. 109–121, 160–187.

20. Qadi Ahmad al-Qummi, *Khulasat al-tawarikh*, ed. Ihsan Ishraqi (Tehran, 1359–63 Sh./1980–84), vol. 1, pp. 582–584, and A. Amanat, 'The Nuqtawi Movement of Mahmud Pisikhani and his Persian Cycle of Mystical-Materialism', in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), especially pp. 289–295.

21. Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Astarabadi, Firishta, *Ta'rikh-i Firishta*, ed. J. Briggs (Bombay, 1832), vol. 2, pp. 213–231; Brigg's English translation of this work under the title *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India* (London, 1829), 4 vols., does not include the section on Shah Tahir. See also 'Ali b. 'Aziz Tabataba, *Burhan-i ma'athir* (Hyderabad, 1936), pp. 251–270, 274–295, 324–325; al-Qadi Nur Allah al-Shushtari, *Majalis al-mu'minin* (Tehran, 1375/1955), vol. 2, pp. 234–240; Ma'sum 'Ali Shah, *Tara'iq al-haqa'iq*, ed. M. J. Mahjub (Tehran, 1339–45 Sh./1960–66), vol. 3, pp. 133–150; Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni, *Khitabat-i 'aliya*, ed. H. Ujaqi (Bombay, 1963), pp. 40–41; Muhammad b. Zayn al-'Abidin Fida'i Khurasani, *Kitab-i hidayat al-mu'minin al-talibin*, ed. A.A. Semenov (Moscow, 1959), pp. 119–132; 'Arif Tamir, *al-Imama fi'l-Islam* (Beirut, 1964), pp. 202–208; Dhabih Allah Safa, *Ta'rikh-i adabiyyat dar Iran* (2nd ed., Tehran, 1355 Sh./1976), vol. 5, part 2, pp. 662–670, and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 486–491, 713–714, where further references are cited.

22. See Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 271–275.

23. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature*, pp. 166–167, and Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 281. The Institute of Ismaili Studies Library possesses copies of the *Lama'at*, divided into 110 chapters or *lama'at* (lit. 'flashes of light').

24. For Ismaili-Sufi relations during the Zand and Qajar periods of Persian history, see N. Pourjavady and P.L. Wilson, 'Isma'ilis and Ni'matullahis', *Studia Islamica*, 41 (1975), pp. 113–135, and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 498–503, 506–507, 517–518, where references to primary sources are cited.

Part III

Aspects of Ismaili Thought

11

Intellectual Life among the Ismailis

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of the intellectual activities of the Ismailis during medieval times.* A major Shiʿi Muslim community, the Ismailis have had a complex and colourful history dating back to the middle of the 8th century. The early Ismailis laid the foundations of their intellectual traditions which were further developed during the Fatimid and subsequent periods in Ismaili history. In the Fatimid period (909–1171), when the Ismailis possessed a flourishing state, they elaborated a diversity of intellectual traditions and institutions of learning, making important contributions to Islamic thought and culture.

I shall concentrate here on selected areas of intellectual activity which were of particular importance to the Ismailis of medieval times. Theology, of course, remained the central concern of Ismaili thought; it played a key role in the teachings of the Ismailis not only as *kalam*, articulated by all Muslim communities, but also as a tradition influencing other intellectual activities of this community. This study will deal briefly with Ismaili activities also in the fields of philosophy, law, historiography, as well as certain distinct traditions and institutions of learning.

The Imami Shiʿi tradition, the common heritage of the Ismailis and the Twelvers or Ithnaʿasharis, was elaborated during the formative period of Shiʿism, lasting until the advent of the Abbasids in 750. This tradition culminated in the central Shiʿi doctrine of the imamate, formalized by Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq and the coterie of his associates who included some of the foremost theologians of the time. Henceforth, the doctrine of the imamate served as the central theological

teaching of the Imami Shiʿis, including the Twelvers and the Ismailis.[1] The earliest Ismailis or Ismaili groups separated from the rest of the Imami Shiʿis in 765, on the death of Imam al-Sadiq who had consolidated Imami Shiʿism. These splinter groups, centred in southern Iraq, now acknowledged the claims of al-Sadiq's eldest son Ismaʿil (hence the designation Ismaʿiliyya) or the latter's son Muhammad, to the imamate.[2] This is how the Ismailis appeared on the historical stage as an independent Shiʿi movement with a particular theology.

In line with their doctrine of the imamate, the earliest Ismailis maintained that the Prophet Muhammad had appointed his cousin and son-in-law ʿAli b. Abi Talib as his successor, and that this designation or *nass* had been instituted by divine command. Like other Imami Shiʿis, the early Ismailis held a particular conception of religious authority based on the assumption of the permanent need of mankind for a divinely-guided imam or spiritual leader, an authoritative teacher with a particular kind of knowledge (*ʿilm*) not available to ordinary human beings. They maintained that this particular religious authority had been vested in ʿAli and certain of his descendants, the persons recognized by them as imams, all belonging to the Prophet's family or the *ahl al-bayt*. After the Prophet, only ʿAli and the succeeding imams possessed the required *ʿilm* and religious authority, which enabled them to act as the sole authoritative channels for elucidating and interpreting the Islamic revelation. These imams were also believed to be divinely guided and immune from error and sin (*maʿsum*) and as such, they were infallible in both their knowledge and teachings after the Prophet.

The earliest Ismailis further held that after ʿAli (d. 661), the imamate was to be transmitted by the rule of *nass* among the Fatimid ʿAlids, the descendants of ʿAli and Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, and after al-Husayn b. ʿAli (d. 680) the imamate would continue in the Husaynid branch of the ʿAlids until the end of time. Thus, there would always be in existence a single legitimate imam, designated by the *nass* of the previous imam, whether or not he was actually ruling as caliph. Indeed, the world could not exist for a moment without an imam, who was the proof of God (*hujjat Allah*) on earth. As in the case of *nass*, each imam's special *ʿilm*, divinely inspired, was traced back to ʿAli and the Prophet Muhammad. It was on the basis of this

ʿilm that each imam was recognized as the authorized source of religious guidance and interpreter of the true meaning of the Qur'an as well as the commandments and prohibitions of Islam. From early on, Ismaili theology was also closely connected to soteriology; salvation would be reserved on the Day of Judgement only for those with faith in and devotion to the *ahl al-bayt*, and more particularly to ʿAli and the rightful imams after him.[3]

By the middle of the 9th century, a secret and rapidly expanding Ismaili religio-political movement, with revolutionary objectives, had been organized by a line of central leaders, who were in due course acknowledged as ʿAlid imams from the progeny of the Shiʿi Imam al-Sadiq. This movement, designated by its members simply as *al-daʿwa* or *al-daʿwa al-hadiya* (the rightly guiding mission), aimed at uprooting the Abbasids (who, like the Umayyads before them, were accused of having usurped the legitimate rights of the ʿAlids) and installing the Ismaili imam to the leadership of the Muslim *umma*. The revolutionary message of the Ismaili *daʿwa* was propagated by a network of *daʿi*s or missionaries operating secretly in many regions of the Islamic world, from Central Asia to Persia, Iraq, Arabia, Yaman and North Africa. During the early, pre-Fatimid phase of their history, the Ismailis evidently produced only a few doctrinal works, preferring to disseminate their teachings by word of mouth. It is nevertheless possible, on the basis of a variety of pre-Fatimid and later Ismaili texts, as well as certain non-Ismaili writings, to convey the main doctrines of the early Ismailis, who laid the foundations of Ismaili theology and certain other intellectual traditions of their community.[4]

By the 890s, in elaborating their distinctive religious system, the Ismailis emphasized a fundamental distinction between the exoteric (*zahir*) and the esoteric (*batin*) dimensions of the sacred scriptures and the religious commandments and prohibitions. Accordingly, they held that the revealed scriptures, including especially the Qur'an, and the laws laid down in them had their apparent or literal meaning, the *zahir*, which had to be distinguished from their inner meaning or true spiritual reality (*haqiqa*) hidden in the *batin*. They further held that the *zahir*, or the religious laws enunciated by the messenger-prophets, underwent periodic change while the *batin*, containing the spiritual truths (*haqa'iq*), remained immutable and eternal. The hidden truths

could be made apparent through *ta'wil*, esoteric exegesis, the process of educing the *batin* from the *zahir*. Similar processes of exegeses or hermeneutics existed in earlier Judaeo-Christian as well as various gnostic traditions, but the immediate antecedents of Ismaili *ta'wil*, also known as *batini ta'wil*, may be traced to the Shi'i milieus of the 8th century in southern Iraq, the cradle of early Shi'ism. The Ismaili *ta'wil* was distinguished from *tanzil*, the actual revelation of scriptures through angelic intermediaries, and from *tafsir*, explanation of the apparent or philological meaning of the sacred texts. In the era of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad had been charged with delivering the Islamic revelation, *tanzil*, while 'Ali was responsible for its *ta'wil*. 'Ali, designated as the *sahib al-ta'wil* or 'master of *ta'wil*', was thus the repository of the Prophet's undivulged knowledge and the original possessor of Islam's true interpretation after the Prophet, a function retained by the 'Alid imams after 'Ali himself.

The passage from *zahir* to *batin*, from *tanzil* to *ta'wil*, or from *shari'a* to *haqiqa*, thus entailed the passage from the world of appearances to spiritual reality; and the initiation into this world of true reality, guided by 'Ali and his successors to the imamate, was paramount to spiritual rebirth for the Ismailis. Indeed, the Ismailis taught that in every age, the esoteric world of spiritual reality could be accessible only to the elite (*khawass*) of mankind, as distinct from the common people (*'awamm*) who were merely capable of understanding the *zahir*, the apparent meaning of the revelations. In the era of Islam, the eternal truths of religion could be revealed only to those who had been properly initiated into the Ismaili *da'wa* and community and recognized the teaching authority of the Prophet Muhammad's *wasi* or legatee, 'Ali, and the imams who succeeded him in the Husaynid 'Alid line; they alone, collectively designated as the *ahl al-ta'wil* or 'people of *ta'wil*' represented the sources of knowledge and authoritative guidance in the era of Islam. For the Ismailis, these authorized guides were, in fact, the very same people referred to in the Qur'an (3:7) by the expression *al-rasikhun fi'l-'ilm* or 'those possessing firm knowledge'.[5] These teachings explain the special role of the imams after 'Ali and of the religious teaching hierarchy in the *da'wa* organization instituted by the Ismaili imams. They also explain why the bulk of the religious literature of the early Ismailis is comprised

of the *ta'wil* genre of writing which seeks justification for Ismaili doctrines in Qur'anic verses. Initiation into Ismailism, known as *balagh*, took place after the adept took an oath of allegiance, known as *'ahd* or *mithaq*. The initiates were bound by this oath to keep secret the *batin* which was imparted to them by a hierarchy (*hudud*) of teachers authorized by the imam. The *batin* was thus both hidden and secret, and its knowledge had to be kept away from the uninitiated common people, the non-Ismaili *'awamm* who had no access to it because they did not acknowledge the rightful spiritual guides of their era.[6]

The Ismailis taught that the eternal truths, the *haqa'iq*, hidden in the *batin*, represented the message common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. However, the truths of these Abrahamic religions had been veiled by different exoteric laws. The early Ismailis developed the implications of these truths in terms of a gnostic system of thought, representing a distinctly Ismaili world view. The two main components of this system were a cyclical history of revelation and a cosmological doctrine.

By the final decades of the 9th century, the Ismailis had already developed a cyclical interpretation of time and the religious history of mankind in terms of eras of different prophets recognized in the Qur'an, which they applied to the Judaeo-Christian revelations as well as a variety of other pre-Islamic religions such as Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. This cyclical view of revelational history was further combined with their doctrine of the imamate.[7] Accordingly, the early Ismailis believed that the religious history of mankind proceeded through seven prophetic eras (*dawr*s) of various duration, each one inaugurated by a messenger-prophet (*natiq*), of a divinely revealed message, which in its exoteric (*zahir*) aspect contained a religious law (*shari'a*). The *natiq*s of the first six eras were Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, 'Isa and Muhammad; they corresponded to the *ulu'l-'azm* prophets, or 'prophets with resolution', recognized in the Qur'an. They had announced the outer aspects of each revelation with its rituals, commandments and prohibitions, fully explaining its inner meaning only to a few close disciples. Each *natiq* was succeeded by a *wasi* or legatee, also called *samit*, 'the silent one', and later *asas* or 'foundation', who expounded only to the elite the esoteric truths (*haqa'iq*) contained in the *batin* dimension of that era's message. The

wasi in the era of Islam was ʿAli b. Abi Talib. The early Ismailis held further that each *wasi* was, in turn, succeeded by seven imams who guarded the true meaning of the divine scriptures and laws in both their *zahir* and *batin* aspects. The seventh imam of every era would rise in rank to become the *natiq* of the following era, abrogating the *shariʿa* of the previous era and proclaiming a new one. This pattern would change in the seventh, final era.

In the sixth *dawr*, the era of Islam, the seventh imam was Muhammad b. Ismaʿil b. Jaʿfar al-Sadiq who had gone into concealment as the Mahdi, the expected restorer of true Islam and justice in the world. On his return, it was believed, he would not bring a new *shariʿa*; instead, he would initiate the final eschatological age, divulging to all mankind the hitherto concealed esoteric truths of all the preceding revelations. In the messianic age of the Mahdi, an age of pure spiritualism, there would no longer be any distinction between the *zahir* and the *batin*. On his advent, Muhammad b. Ismaʿil would rule in justice before the physical world ended. All this also explains the great messianic appeal and popular success of the early Ismaili *daʿwa*. Subsequently, the Ismailis of the Fatimid period developed a different conception of the sixth era, recognizing continuity in the imamate rather than limiting it to a single heptad and removing the expectations connected with the coming of the Mahdi and the final millenarian age indefinitely into the future. On the other hand, the dissident Qarmatis, who separated from the loyal Fatimid Ismailis around the year 899, retained their original belief in the Mahdiship of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil and his eschatological role as the seventh *natiq*.[8]

The early Ismailis also elaborated a cosmological doctrine as the second main component of their *haqa'iq* system. This doctrine, based upon a cosmogonic myth, represented an original gnostic tradition in which cosmology was closely connected to soteriology and a specific view of the sacred history of mankind. In this system, too, man's salvation ultimately depended on his knowledge of God, the creation and his own origins - a knowledge which had been periodically made accessible to man through special messenger-prophets (*natiq*s) whose teachings were guarded and further expounded by their rightful successors.[9]

It was on the basis of such doctrines, rooted in a gnostic and ecumenical world view, that the Ismailis developed their system of thought; and this system proved appealing not only to Muslims belonging to a diversity of communities of interpretation and social strata, but also to a variety of non-Islamic religious communities.

The success of the early Ismaili *da'wa* was crowned by the establishment of the Fatimid state in 909 in North Africa. The Fatimid period is often depicted as the 'golden age' of Ismailism. The revolutionary movement of the early Ismailis had finally led to the foundation of a state or *dawla* headed by the Ismaili imam, which soon expanded into a flourishing empire extending from North Africa and Egypt to Palestine, the Hijaz and Syria. This was indeed a great success for the entire Shi'a, who now witnessed for the first time the succession of an 'Alid from the *ahl al-bayt* to the leadership of an important Muslim state. With the Fatimid victory, the Ismaili imam presented his own Shi'i challenge to Abbasid hegemony and Sunni interpretations of Islam. Ismaili Shi'ism, too, now found its place among the state-sponsored communities of interpretation in Islam. Henceforth, the Fatimid caliph, who was at the same time the Ismaili imam, could act as the spiritual spokesman of Shi'i Islam in general, as the Abbasid caliph had been the mouthpiece of Sunni Islam. Under the circumstances, the Ismailis were now permitted, for the first time in their history, to practise their faith openly without fearing persecution within Fatimid dominions, while outside the boundaries of their state they continued to observe *taqiyya*, or precautionary dissimulation, as before.

In line with their universal claims, the Fatimid caliph-imams did not abandon their *da'wa* activities on assuming power. Aiming to extend their authority and rule over the entire Muslim *umma*, they retained their *da'wa* and network of *da'i*s, operating both within and outside Fatimid dominions. Special institutions of learning and teaching were also set up for the training of *da'i*s and instruction of ordinary Ismailis. Educated as theologians, the *da'i*s of the Fatimid period were at the same time the scholars and authors of their community, and they produced the classical texts of Ismaili literature on a variety of exoteric and esoteric subjects, ranging from biographical and historical works to elaborate theological, legal and philosophical treatises, as well as major works on *ta'wil*, a hallmark of Ismailism.[10]

Some of these *daʿi*s elaborated distinctive intellectual traditions, amalgamating different philosophical traditions with Ismaili theology. Indeed, it was during the Fatimid period that Ismaili thought and literature of the medieval period attained their peak, and the Ismailis made their seminal contributions to Islamic theology and philosophy in general and to Shiʿi thought in particular. Modern recovery of Ismaili literature clearly attests to the richness and diversity of the literary and intellectual heritage of the Ismailis of the Fatimid period. In Egypt, the Fatimids patronized intellectual activities in general. They created major libraries in Cairo, their new capital city founded in 969, which rapidly grew into a centre of Islamic scholarship, sciences, art and culture, in addition to playing a prominent role in international trade and commerce. All in all, the Fatimid period represents one of the great eras in Egyptian and Islamic histories, and a milestone in Islamic civilization.[11]

The Fatimid *daʿi*s produced numerous theological treatises in which the doctrine of the imamate retained its centrality. The *daʿi*-authors also dealt with a host of theological issues which had preoccupied other Muslim theologians, ranging from distinctive views on the divine attributes to human salvation and the question of free will versus predestination. Like other Muslim thinkers, some of these *daʿi*s, especially those operating in the Iranian lands, also elaborated metaphysical systems in which they included a variety of cosmological doctrines.

By the end of the 9th century, much of the intellectual heritage of antiquity had become accessible to Muslims. This had resulted from the great translation movement into Arabic of numerous texts of Greek wisdom. The Muslims now became closely acquainted not only with different branches of Greek sciences, but also with logic and metaphysics. In philosophy, together with the works of the great Greek masters such as Plato and Aristotle, the writings of some of the authors of the so-called Neoplatonic school were also translated into Arabic with commentaries. These Arabic Neoplatonic materials, rooted in the teachings of Plotinus and his disciples but often wrongly attributed to Aristotle, proved to have seminal influences on the development of Islamic philosophy in general and the Ismaili thought of the Fatimid period in particular.

Neoplatonic philosophy proved particularly attractive to the learned *daʿi*s of the Iranian lands who, in the course of the 10th century, set about to interface Ismaili theology with Neoplatonic doctrines. This led to the development of a unique intellectual tradition of philosophical theology within Ismailism, also designated as 'philosophical Ismailism'. The *daʿi*s of the Iranian lands, starting with Muhammad al-Nasafi (d. 943) and Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 934), wrote for the ruling elite and the educated classes of society, aiming to attract them intellectually to the *daʿwa*. This explains why they chose to express their theology in terms of the then most modern and intellectually fashionable philosophical themes, without compromising the essence of their religious message which, as before, revolved around Qur'anic revelation and the Shiʿi doctrine of the imamate.

The Iranian *daʿi*s elaborated complex metaphysical systems of thought with a distinct Neoplatonized emanational cosmology, representing the earliest tradition of philosophical theology in Shiʿism. It should be added that these *daʿi*s also became involved in a long-drawn debate on various theological and metaphysical issues. At any rate, the success of the Iranian *daʿi*s is attested by the fact that a number of rulers in Central Asia, Khurasan and northern Persia, including a Samanid amir, converted to Ismailism.

The early evidence of the tradition of philosophical theology in Ismailism is mainly preserved in the works of Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani,[12] the *daʿi* of eastern Persia and Transoxania who was executed as a 'heretic' on the order of the Saffarid ruler of Sistan, Khalaf b. Ahmad (963–1003). In the Neoplatonized Ismaili cosmology, God is conceived as absolutely transcendent, beyond human comprehension, beyond any name or attribute, beyond being and non-being, and hence essentially unknowable. This conception of God, reminiscent of the ineffable One of Greek Neoplatonism, was in close agreement with the fundamental Islamic principle of *tawhid*, the affirmation of the absolute unity of God. Through a dialectic of double negation, al-Sijistani refuted both *tashbih*, anthropomorphism, and *taʿtil*, rejection of any particular divine attribute. Al-Sijistani and other Iranian *daʿi*s also identified certain basic concepts of their emanational cosmology with Qur'anic terms. Thus, universal intellect (*ʿaql*) and universal soul (*nafs*), the first and second originated beings in the spiritual world,

were identified with the Qur'anic notions of the 'pen' (*qalam*) and the 'tablet' (*lawh*), respectively.

The Ismaili theologian-philosophers of the Iranian world also propounded a doctrine of salvation as part of their cosmology. In their soteriological vision of the cosmos, man generally appears as a microcosm with individual human souls as parts of the universal soul. In the case of al-Sijistani, for instance, his doctrine of salvation, elaborated in purely spiritual terms, is closely related to his doctrine of soul and the Ismaili cyclical view of religious history of mankind. Here, the ultimate goal of human salvation is the soul's progression out of a purely physical existence towards its creator, in quest of a spiritual reward in an eternal afterlife. This ascending quest along a ladder of salvation, or *sullam al-najat* (chosen as the title of one of al-Sijistani's books), involves purification of man's soul, which depends on guidance provided by a terrestrial hierarchy of teachers; only the authorized members of this hierarchy are in a position to reveal the 'right path' along which the true believers are guided and whose resurrected souls will be rewarded spiritually on the Day of Judgement. In every era of human history, the terrestrial hierarchy consists of the law-announcing speaker-prophet (*natiq*) of that era and his rightful successors. In the current era of Islam, the guidance needed for knowing the truth and attaining salvation is provided by the Prophet Muhammad, his *wasi* ʿAli, and the Ismaili imams in ʿAli's progeny. In other words, man's salvation depends on his acquisition of a particular type of knowledge from a unique source or wellspring of wisdom. The required knowledge can be imparted only through the teachings of these divinely authorized guides, the sole possessors of the true meaning of the revelation who can provide its authoritative interpretation through *ta'wil*.

It is, thus, important to bear in mind that the proponents of philosophical Ismailism used philosophy (*falsafa*) in a subservient manner to their theology (*kalam*), resorting to sophisticated philosophical themes primarily to enhance the intellectual appeal of their message. Classical Ismaili theology, indeed, remained on the whole 'revelational' rather than 'rational', despite the efforts of the Iranian *daʿi*s to adopt reason and free enquiry in their systems. In sum, these *daʿi*s remained devout theologians propagating the doctrine of the imamate. The

Neoplatonized Ismaili cosmology, developed in the Iranian lands, was endorsed by the central headquarters of the Ismaili *daʿwa* in North Africa in the time of the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Muʿizz (953–975), replacing the earlier mythological cosmology of the Ismailis. As a result, the new cosmology was advocated by Fatimid *daʿi*-authors at least until the time of Nasir-i Khusraw (d. after 1072), the last major proponent of philosophical Ismailism in Fatimid times and the only *daʿi* of the period to have written all his works in Persian.

Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, perhaps the most learned theologian-philosopher of the Fatimid period and the chief *daʿi* of Iraq and western Persia, developed his own metaphysics in the *Rahat al-ʿaql*, his major philosophical treatise completed in 1020.[13] Al-Kirmani's cosmology was partially based on al-Farabi's Aristotelian system of ten separate intellects. His system, too, representing a unique tradition within the Iranian school of philosophical Ismailism, culminates in a soteriological doctrine centred around the salvation of man's soul through the attainment of spiritual knowledge provided by the authoritative guidance of prophets and their legitimate successors. As in the case of his predecessors, in al-Kirmani's metaphysics there also exists numerous correspondences between the celestial and terrestrial hierarchies. For unknown reasons, however, al-Kirmani's cosmology did not prevail in the Fatimid *daʿwa*, but it later provided the basis for the cosmological doctrine expounded by the Mustaʿli Tayyibi *daʿwa* in Yaman. It may also be noted that al-Kirmani acted as an arbiter in the debate that had taken place among the *daʿi*s al-Nasafi, al-Razi and al-Sijistani; he reviewed this debate from the perspective of the Fatimid *daʿwa* and sided with al-Razi against certain antinomian views expressed by al-Nasafi.[14] All this once again attests to the diversity of traditions espoused by the *daʿi*s and the relative freedom they enjoyed in their intellectual enquiries within the compass of Ismaili Shiʿism.

Despite his central role as the representative of the Ismaili *daʿwa*, very little seems to have been written by Ismaili authors on the subject of the *daʿi*, who often acted as both a missionary and a teacher. The *daʿi*s, appointed only by the imam's permission, enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in the regions under their jurisdiction. The *daʿi*s had to have sufficient knowledge of both the *zahir* and the *batin*, or the

shariʿa and its esoteric interpretation. As a result, the Fatimids paid much attention to the training of the *daʿi*s and founded a variety of institutions for that purpose. The high esteem of the Ismailis for learning resulted in a number of distinctive traditions and institutions in the Fatimid period. The Ismaili *daʿwa* was concerned from early on with educating the converts and teaching them the *hikma* or 'wisdom', referring to Ismaili esoteric doctrines. Consequently, a variety of lectures or 'teaching sessions', generally designated as *majalis* were organized. These sessions, which gradually became more formalized and specialized, served different pedagogical purposes and were addressed to different audiences, especially in the Fatimid capital. However, there were basically two types of teaching sessions, namely, public lectures for large audiences on Ismaili law and other exoteric subjects, and private lectures on Ismaili esoteric doctrines known as the *majalis al-hikma* or 'sessions of wisdom', reserved exclusively for the benefit of the Ismaili initiates,[15] and held at the Fatimid palace. The lectures, delivered by the *daʿi al-duʿat*, the chief *daʿi* acting as the administrative head of the *daʿwa* organization, were normally approved beforehand by the Ismaili imam. Only the imam was the source of *hikma*, with the *daʿi* acting merely as his representative through whom the initiates received their instruction in Ismaili esoteric doctrines. Some of these lectures, culminating in the *majalis* of al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi who held the office of *daʿi al-duʿat* for twenty years until shortly before his death in 1078, were in due course collected in writing.[16] The *majalis* gradually developed into an elaborate programme of instruction for different audiences, including women. Another of the major institutions of learning founded by the Fatimids was the Dar al-'Ilm, the House of Knowledge, sometimes also called the Dar al-Hikma. Established in 1005 by the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Hakim (996–1021) in a section of the Fatimid palace in Cairo, a variety of religious and non-religious sciences were taught at the Dar al-'Ilm which was also equipped with a major library. Many Fatimid *daʿi*s received at least part of their training at this institution which variously served the Ismaili *daʿwa*.[17] Religious scholars, jurists, scientists and librarians worked at the Dar al-'Ilm, drawing salaries from the Fatimid treasury or that institution's endowment set up by al-Hakim himself.

The Sunni polemicists, supported by the Abbasids, intensified their anti-Ismaili campaign after the establishment of the Fatimid state. Amongst various defamations, they claimed that the Ismailis did not observe the *shariʿa* because they claimed to have found access to its hidden meaning in the *batin*; hence they also referred to the Ismaʿiliyya, often pejoratively, as the Batiniyya or 'Esotericists' in addition to *malahida* or 'heretics'. It is a fact that the Fatimids from early on concerned themselves with legalistic matters, and Ismaili literature of the Fatimid period persistently underlines the inseparability of the *zahir* and the *batin*, of observing the *shariʿa* as well as understanding its inner, spiritual significance. At the time of the advent of the Fatimids, there did not yet exist a distinctly Ismaili school of jurisprudence. Until then, the Ismailis belonged to a secret revolutionary movement and observed the law of the land wherever they lived. It was on the establishment of the Fatimid state that the need arose for codifying Ismaili law, and the process started by putting into practice the precepts of Shiʿi law.

The promulgation of an Ismaili *madhhab* or school of jurisprudence resulted mainly from the efforts of al-Qadi Abu Hanifa al-Nuʿman b. Muhammad (d. 974), the most learned jurist of the entire Fatimid period. He codified Ismaili law by systematically collecting the firmly established *hadith*s transmitted from the *ahl al-bayt*, drawing on earlier Shiʿi as well as Sunni authorities.[18] After producing several legal compendia, his efforts culminated in the compilation of the *Daʿa'im al-Islam* (*The Pillars of Islam*), which served as the official legal code of the Fatimid state. The Ismailis, too, had now come to possess a system of law and jurisprudence, also delineating an Ismaili paradigm of governance. As developed by al-Qadi al-Nuʿman, under the close scrutiny of the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Muʿizz, Ismaili law accorded central importance to the doctrine of the imamate, which also provided Islamic legitimation for an ʿAlid state ruled by the *ahl al-bayt*. The authority of the ʿAlid imam and his teachings became the third principal source of Ismaili law, after the Qur'an and the *sunna* of the Prophet which are accepted as the first two sources by all Muslim communities. Al-Qadi al-Nuʿman was also the founder of a distinguished family of chief judges (*qadi al-qudat*) in the Fatimid state. It may be noted that the *Daʿa'im al-Islam* has continued to be

used by Mustaʿli Tayyibi Ismailis as their principal authority in legal matters to the present day.

The legal doctrines of the Ismaili *madhhab* were applied by the judiciary throughout the Fatimid dominions. However, the Ismaili legal code was new and its precepts had to be explained to Ismailis as well as other Muslim subjects of the Fatimid state. This was accomplished in regular public sessions, originally held by al-Qadi al-Nuʿman himself, on Fridays after the midday prayers. In Cairo, public sessions on Ismaili law were held at the great mosques of al-Azhar, ʿAmr and al-Hakim. The credit for using al-Azhar, founded as a mosque by the caliph-imam al-Muʿizz, as a teaching centre on law from 988 onwards, belongs to Ibn Killis (d. 991), the first official vizier of the Fatimids who was also an accomplished jurist and patron of the arts and sciences.

The Ismailis were often persecuted outside the territories of their states, which necessitated the strict observance of *taqiyya* or precautionary dissimulation. Furthermore, the Ismaili *daʿi*-authors, as noted, were for the most part trained as theologians who frequently served the *daʿwa* in hostile milieus. Owing to their training as well as the necessity of observing secrecy in their activities, the *daʿi*-authors were not particularly inclined to compiling annalistic or other types of historical accounts. This is attested to by the fact that only a few historical works have come to light in the modern recovery of a large number of Ismaili texts. These include al-Qadi al-Nuʿman's *Iftitah al-daʿwa* (*Commencement of the Mission*), the earliest known historical work in Ismaili literature which covers the background to the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate. In later medieval times, only one general history of Ismailism was produced by an Ismaili author, namely, the *ʿUyun al-akhbar* (*Choice Stories*) of Idris ʿImad al-Din (d. 1468), the nineteenth Mustaʿli Tayyibi *daʿi* in Yaman. Aside from strictly historical writings, the Ismailis of the Fatimid period also produced a few biographical works of the *sira* genre with important historical details.

There were, however, two periods in Ismaili history during which Ismaili leaders concerned themselves with historiography, and they encouraged or commissioned works which may be regarded as official chronicles. On the two occasions when the Ismailis possessed

their own states and dynasties of rulers, the Fatimid caliphate and the Nizari state, they needed reliable chroniclers to record the events and political achievements of their states.[19] In Fatimid times, especially after the transference of the seat of the Fatimid state from Ifriqiya to Egypt in 973, numerous histories of the Fatimid state and dynasty were compiled by contemporary historians, both Ismaili and non-Ismaili. With the exception of a few fragments, however, the Fatimid chronicles have not survived. When the Ayyubids succeeded the Fatimids in Egypt in 1171, they destroyed the renowned Fatimid libraries. All types of Ismaili literature as well as the Fatimid chronicles perished as a result of Ayyubid persecutions of the Ismailis.

By 1094, the unified Ismaili *daʿwa* and community of the Fatimid times were split into rival Mustaʿli and Nizari branches. The schism resulted from the dispute over the succession to the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mustansir (1036–1094). The Mustaʿli Ismailis, who became further subdivided into a number of groups, eventually found their stronghold in Yaman. The Tayyibis, representing the only surviving Mustaʿli community, have been led by hereditary lines of *daʿi*s, who retained a number of Fatimid traditions of learning. The Tayyibis of Yaman and India, where they are known as Bohras, have also preserved a good share of the Ismaili literature of the Fatimid period.

The Nizari Ismailis have had a different destiny. By 1094, the Ismailis of Persia were already under the leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 1124), who in the Nizari-Mustaʿli dispute upheld the rights of Nizar (d. 1095), al-Mustansir's original heir-designate who had been deprived of his succession rights. Hasan-i Sabbah, in fact, founded the independent Nizari state and *daʿwa* centred at the mountain fortress of Alamut in northern Persia.[20] In due course, the Nizaris also established a subsidiary state in Syria. Hasan launched an open revolt from a network of mountain fortresses against the Saljuq Turks, whose alien rule was detested in Persia. The Nizaris remained preoccupied with their struggle and survival in a hostile environment during the reigns of Hasan's successors at Alamut. As a result, the Persian Nizari community did not produce many scholars concerned with complex theological issues or metaphysics comparable to those living in Fatimid times. Nevertheless, the Nizaris did maintain a literary tradition and certain theological

issues continued to provide the focus of the Nizari thought of the Alamut period.

Hasan-i Sabbah himself was a learned theologian and he is also credited with establishing an impressive library at Alamut soon after he set up his headquarters in that stronghold in 1090. Later, other major Nizari fortresses in Persia and Syria were equipped with significant collections of books, documents and scientific instruments. In the doctrinal field, the Nizaris from early on reaffirmed as their central teaching the doctrine of the imamate, or the necessity of authoritative teaching by the rightful imam of the time. Under the circumstances, the outsiders acquired the impression that the Nizari Ismailis had initiated a 'new preaching' (*al-daʿwa al-jadida*) in contrast to the 'old preaching' (*al-daʿwa al-qadima*) of the Fatimid times. The 'new preaching' did not actually represent any new doctrine however; it was essentially a reformulation of the old Shiʿi doctrine of the imamate,which now became commonly known as the doctrine of *taʿlim* or authoritative teaching by the imam.

Hasan-i Sabbah restated the doctrine of *taʿlim* in a more rigorous form in a theological treatise which has not survived, but it has been quoted or fragmentarily preserved in other sources.[21] In a series of four propositions, Hasan restated the inadequacy of reason in knowing God and understanding the religious truths, arguing for the necessity of an authoritative teacher (*muʿallim-i sadiq*) for the spiritual guidance of mankind, and he concluded that this trustworthy teacher is none other than the Ismaili imam of the time. The doctrine of *taʿlim* served as the central teaching of the Nizaris, who henceforth were designated by outsiders as the Taʿlimiyya. The intellectual challenge posed to the Sunni establishment by this doctrine, which also refuted the legitimacy of the Abbasid caliph as the spiritual spokesman of Muslims, called forth a new polemical campaign against the Ismailis. Many Sunni theologians, led by al-Ghazali (d. 1111), attacked the Ismailis and their doctrine of *taʿlim*; a detailed reply to al-Ghazali's anti-Ismaili polemics was later provided by the fifth Tayyibi *daʿi* in Yaman.[22] The doctrine of *taʿlim*, emphasizing the autonomous teaching authority of each imam in his time, provided the theological foundation for all the subsequent Nizari teachings.[23]

The intellectual life of the Nizaris of the Alamut period culminated in the declaration of the *qiyama* or Resurrection in 1164 by the fourth lord of Alamut, Hasan, whose name was always mentioned by the Nizaris with the expression *ʿala dhikrihi'l-salam* or 'on his mention be peace', and with whom the line of Nizari Ismaili imams emerged openly. However, relying on *ta'wil* and earlier Ismaili traditions, the *qiyama* or the long-awaited Last Day when mankind would be judged and committed eternally to either Paradise or Hell, was interpreted symbolically and spiritually for the Nizaris. The *qiyama* now meant the manifestation of unveiled truth or *haqiqa* in the person of the Nizari imam. In other words, this was a spiritual resurrection reserved exclusively for those who acknowledged the rightful imam of the time and as such were capable of understanding the esoteric truths of religion. In this sense, Paradise was actualized in the corporeal world for the Nizaris. The Nizaris were now to rise to a spiritual level of existence, moving along a spiritual path from *zahir* to *batin*, from *shariʿa* to *haqiqa*, or from the literal interpretation of the law to an understanding of its inner essence. On the other hand, those who did not recognize the Nizari imam and were thus incapable of apprehending the truth were rendered spiritually non-existent. Now the imam initiating the *qiyama* would be the *qa'im al-qiyama* or 'Lord of the Resurrection', a rank higher than that of an ordinary imam. The declaration of the *qiyama*, which was later elaborated in terms of a theological doctrine, represents the most controversial episode in the entire Nizari history; and modern scholars disagree among themselves on aspects of this event and its implications for the contemporary Nizari community. Be that as it may, the *qiyama* initiated a new spiritual and esoteric era in the life of the Nizari community. In a sense, this was the culmination of the Ismaili interpretation of Islam and the sacred history of mankind.[24]

The Nizaris also extended their patronage of learning to outside scholars, including Sunnis, Twelver Shiʿis and even non-Muslims. A large number of such scholars found refuge in Nizari strongholds, especially in the wake of the Mongol invasions of Central Asia in the 1220s. These scholars availed themselves of the Nizari libraries and patronage of learning. The intellectual life of the Nizari community received a special impetus from the continuing influx of outside

scholars during the final decades of the Alamut period. Foremost among such scholars was Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274), who spent some three decades in the Nizari fortress communities of Persia until the Mongol destruction of the Persian Nizari state in 1256. A renowned theologian, philosopher and astronomer, al-Tusi made important contributions to the Nizari thought of the late Alamut period. The *Rawdat al-taslim* (*Garden of Submission*), his major Ismaili work, as well as the *Sayr va suluk*, his spiritual autobiography in which he explains how he came to acknowledge the teaching authority of the Nizari imam, date to that prolific period in al-Tusi's life.[25]

The Nizari Ismailis of the Alamut period (1090–1256), too, developed a historiographical tradition and compiled chronicles recording the events of the Persian Nizari state according to the reigns of the successive rulers of Alamut. This tradition commenced with a work entitled *Sargudhasht-i Sayyidna* (*Biography of our Master*), covering the career of the founder of the Nizari state, Hasan-i Sabbah, and the major events of his reign (1090–1124). All these official chronicles, preserved at Alamut and other Nizari strongholds in Persia, perished in the Mongol invasions of 1256 or soon afterwards. But the Nizari chronicles and other writings were seen and used extensively by a group of Persian historians of the Ilkhanid period, notably Juwayni (d. 1283), Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah (d. 1318) and Abu'l-Qasim Kashani (d. ca. 1337), who remain our main sources for the history of the Nizari Ismaili state in Persia.

In the aftermath of the destruction of their state and fortresses by the Mongols in 1256, the disorganized Persian Nizaris survived clandestinely in scattered communities. The Nizaris now began to practise *taqiyya* for extended periods, adopting different Sunni, Sufi and Twelver Shi'i guises to safeguard themselves against persecution. However, the Nizaris' total disintegration or complete assimilation into the religiously dominant communities of their surroundings was largely prevented by their religious traditions and identity revolving around the Nizari imamate. By the middle of the 15th century, when the Nizari imams emerged in Anjudan, in central Persia, initiating a revival in Nizari *da'wa* and literary activities, a type of coalescence had occurred in Persia and adjacent regions between Nizari Ismailism and Sufism, two esoteric traditions in Islam which share

close affinities and common doctrinal grounds. During the Anjudan revival, lasting some two centuries until the end of the 17th century, the Nizari *da'wa* met with particular success in Central Asia and India. In Sind, Gujarat and other parts of the Indian subcontinent, the Hindu converts to Ismailism were generally designated as Khojas, while the specific form of Ismailism that developed in India became known as Satpanth or the True Path.

In the post-Alamut period, different Nizari communities developed, more or less, independently of one another. At least four different literary traditions may be traced to the Anjudan period, when Nizari intellectual activities were somewhat revived and doctrinal works were once again composed by a few authors.[26] In the writings of authors such as Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. in the 15th century) and Khayrkhwah-i Harati (d. after 1553), we have examples of the Persian Nizari tradition permeated with Sufi ideas and terminologies such as *pir* and *murid*, terms referring to a Sufi master and his disciple. Nizari Quhistani (d. 1320), a poet who hailed from Quhistan in eastern Persia, may have been the first post-Alamut author to have chosen the poetic and Sufi forms of expression, partly as a form of *taqiyya* for concealing Ismaili ideas. The Nizari tradition that developed in Central Asia, particularly in Badakhshan, bore close affinity to the Persian tradition in using the Persian language as well as Sufi ideas. In the Central Asian tradition, however, the authentic and spurious works of Nasir-i Khusraw occupy a prominent role. Nasir-i Khusraw is indeed highly revered as the founder of their communities by the Nizaris of Badakhshan (now divided by the Oxus between Tajikistan and Afghanistan) and adjacent regions in Hunza and other areas of northern Pakistan. Central Asian Nizaris have also preserved the bulk of the extant Persian Nizari literature produced during the Alamut and later times. The Syrian Nizaris elaborated yet another literary tradition, based on Arabic, in which certain popular local Shi'i ideas as well as aspects of Fatimid Ismaili thought find expression.

Meanwhile, the Nizari Khojas of the Indian subcontinent developed their own distinctive tradition, the Satpanth, as expressed in their indigenous religious literature, the *ginan*s.[27] Composed in a number of South Asian languages, the hymn-like *ginan*s were transmitted orally for several centuries before they were recorded mainly in the Khojki

script developed in Sind by the Khoja community. Modern scholars of Satpanth have generally attributed the Muslim-Hindu interfacing of this Ismaili tradition to the preaching strategy of the *da'i*s, generally known in India as *pir*s, who evidently adapted their conversion policies to maximize the appeal of their message in a non-Islamic, predominantly Hindu milieu. Consequently, they integrated their Ismaili teachings with myths, images and symbols familiar to Hindu audiences. The doctrine of the imamate, too, occasionally found expression in a Hindu mythological framework intended to ease the passage of conversion to Ismaili Islam. By so doing, the Ismailis also performed an important role in bridging the divide between the Muslim and Hindu communities of medieval India.

The Ismailis emerged as an Imami Shi'i community with the doctrine of the imamate as their central teaching; and this doctrine has constituted the foundation of the various intellectual and literary traditions elaborated by the Ismailis throughout their turbulent history in medieval times. Indeed, the Ismaili identity has continued to revolve around the devotion to the rightful imam of the time, the present or *hazir* imam of the Ismailis. It is their unwavering devotion to the institution of the imamate, as well as their rich intellectual, spiritual and cultural heritage, that has enabled the Ismailis to survive in many countries of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the West as a united and cohesive religious community, in spite of the vicissitudes of their history.

Notes

* A longer version of this chapter appeared as 'Intellectual Life among the Ismailis: An Overview', in F. Daftary, ed., *Intellectual Traditions in Islam* (London, 2000), pp. 87–111.

1. See Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni, *al-Usul min al-kafi*, ed. 'A.A. al-Ghaffari (Tehran, 1388/1968), vol. 1, pp. 168–548; al-Qadi al-Nu'man, *Da'a'im al-Islam*, ed. A.A.A. Fyzee (Cairo, 1951–61), vol. 1, pp. 14–98; English trans., *The Pillars of Islam*, tr. A.A.A. Fyzee, completely revised by I.K. Poonawala (New Delhi, 2002–2004), vol. 1, pp. 18–122.
2. Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq al-Shi'a*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul,

1931), pp. 57–58, 60–64; Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allah al-Qummi, *Kitab al-maqalat wa'l-firaq*, ed. M.J. Mashkur (Tehran, 1963), pp. 80–81, 83–86, and F. Daftary, 'The Earliest Ismaʿilis', *Arabica*, 38 (1991), pp. 214–245; reprinted in E. Kohlberg, ed., *Shiʿism* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 235–266.

3. See, for instance, al-Qadi al-Nuʿman, *Sharh al-akhbar*, ed. S.M. al-Husayni al-Jalali (Qumm, 1409–12/1988–92), vol. 1, pp. 87–250.

4. For further details on early Ismaili *daʿwa*, see W. Madelung, 'Das Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre', *Der Islam*, 37 (1961), especially pp. 43–86, and F. Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 91–143.

5. See al-Muʾayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi, *al-Majalis al-Muʾayyadiyya*, ed. M. Ghalib (Beirut, 1974–84), vol. 1, pp. 347–351.

6. Valuable details on this process of gradual initiation are related in the *Kitab al-ʿalim wa'l-ghulam*, in M. Ghalib, ed., *Arbaʿ kutub haqqaniyya* (Beirut, 1983), pp. 13–75; ed. and tr. J.W. Morris as *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue* (London, 2001), text pp. 1–95, translation pp. 61–171. See also H. Corbin, 'Un roman initiatique Ismaélien du Xe siècle', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 15 (1972), pp. 1–25, 121–142, and his 'L'initiation Ismaélienne ou l'ésotérisme et le Verbe', *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 39 (1970), pp. 41–142; reprinted in his *L'homme et son ange* (Paris, 1983), pp. 81–205.

7. Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman, *Kitab al-rushd wa'l-hidaya*, ed. M. Kamil Husayn, in W. Ivanow, ed., *Collectanea*: Vol. 1 (Leiden, 1948), pp. 185–213; Jaʿfar b. Mansur al-Yaman, *Kitab al-kashf*, ed. R. Strothmann (London, etc., 1952), pp. 14ff., 50, 97, 104, 109–110, 113–114, 132–133, 138, 169–170; Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani, *Ithbat al-nubuwwat*, ed. ʿA. Tamir (Beirut, 1966), pp. 181–193; al-Qadi al-Nuʿman, *Asas al-ta'wil*, ed. ʿA. Tamir (Beirut, 1960), pp. 315–367. See also H. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, tr. R. Manheim and J.W. Morris (London, 1983), pp. 1–58; P.E. Walker, 'Eternal Cosmos and the Womb of History: Time in Early Ismaili Thought', *IJMES*, 9 (1978), pp. 355–366, and F. Daftary, 'Dawr', *EIR*, vol. 7, pp. 151–153.

8. On the Ismaili-Qarmati schism, see W. Madelung, 'The Fatimids and the Qarmatis of Bahrayn', in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Ismaʿili History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 21–73, and F. Daftary, 'A Major Schism in the Early Ismaʿili Movement', *Studia Islamica*, 77 (1993), pp. 123–139.

9. See S.M. Stern, 'The Earliest Cosmological Doctrines of Ismaʿilism', in his *Studies in Early Ismaʿilism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983), pp. 3–29; H. Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismaʿiliya* (Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 18–127, and his 'The Cosmology of the Pre-Fatimid Ismaʿiliyya', in Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Ismaʿili History*, pp. 75–83.

10. See I.K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismaʿili Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977), especially pp. 31–132.

11. See Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis*, pp. 144–255, 615–654, where full references are given; H. Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids*, tr. M. Bonner (Leiden, 1996), pp. 121–274, and A. Fu'ad Sayyid, *al-Dawla al-Fatimiyya fi Misr* (Cairo, 1413/1992).

12. In particular, see his *Kitab al-yanabiʿ*, ed. and French tr. H. Corbin, in his *Trilogie Ismaélienne* (Tehran and Paris, 1961), text pp. 1–97, translation pp. 5–127; English trans. in P.E. Walker's *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani's Kitab al-Yanabiʿ* (Salt Lake City, 1994), pp. 37–111. See also P.E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 67–142; his *Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani: Intellectual Missionary* (London, 1996), pp. 26–103, and W. Madelung, 'Aspects of Ismaʿili Theology: The Prophetic Chain and the God Beyond Being', in S.H. Nasr, ed., *Ismaʿili Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Tehran, 1977), pp. 53–65; reprinted in his *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London, 1985), article XVII.

13. Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, *Rahat al-ʿaql*, ed. M. Kamil Husayn and M. Mustafa Hilmi (Leiden, 1953); ed. M. Ghalib (Beirut, 1967). See also D. de Smet, *La Quiétude de l'intellect: Néoplatonisme et gnose Ismaélienne dans l'oeuvre de Hamid ad-Din al-Kirmani (X^e/XI^e s.)* (Louvain, 1995), and P.E. Walker, *Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Hakim* (London, 1999).

14. See al-Kirmani, *Kitab al-riyad*, ed. ʿArif Tamir (Beirut, 1960), and Madelung, 'Das Imamat', pp. 101–114.

15. Taqi al-Din Ahmad al-Maqrizi, *Kitab al-mawaʿiz wa'l-iʿtibar fi dhikr al-khitat wa'l-athar*, ed. A. Fu'ad Sayyid (London, 1995), pp. 91–94; H. Halm, 'The Ismaʿili Oath of Allegiance (*ʿahd*) and the "Sessions of Wisdom" (*majalis al-hikma*) in Fatimid Times', in Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Ismaʿili History*, pp. 91–115, and his *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning* (London, 1997), especially pp. 23–29, 41–55.

16. See, for instance, al-Qadi al-Nuʿman, *Taʾwil al-daʿaʾim*, ed. M.H. al-Aʿzami (Cairo, 1967–72), 3 vols., which is the *batini* companion to his *zahiri* legal compendium, the *Daʿaʾim al-Islam*; Abu'l-Qasim b. Wahb al-Maliji, *al-Majalis al-Mustansiriyya*, ed. M. Kamil Husayn (Cairo, 1947), and al-Muʾayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi, *al-Majalis al-Muʾayyadiyya*, vols. 1 and 3; the remaining *majalis* contained in vols. 4–8 are still in manuscript form.

17. Al-Maqrizi, *al-Khitat*, pp. 300–304, and Halm, *The Fatimids*, pp. 71–77.

18. W. Madelung, 'The Sources of Ismaʿili Law', *Journal of Near Eastern*

Studies, 35 (1976), pp. 29–40; reprinted in his *Religious Schools*, article XVIII, and I.K. Poonawala, 'Al-Qadi al-Nu'man and Isma'ili Jurisprudence', in Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History*, pp. 117–143.

19. See C.H. Becker, *Beiträge zur Geschichte Ägyptens unter dem Islam* (Strassburg, 1902–3), vol. 1, pp. 1–31; C. Cahen, 'Quelques chroniques anciennes relatives aux derniers Fatimides', *Bulletin de l'Institut Francais d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire*, 37 (1937–38), pp. 1–27; M. Kamil Husayn, *Fi adab Misr al-Fatimiyya* (Cairo, 1950), pp. 108ff.; A. Fu'ad Sayyid, 'Lumières nouvelles sur quelques sources de l'histoire Fatimide en Égypte', *Annales Islamologiques*, 13 (1977), pp. 1–41, and F. Daftary, 'Persian Historiography of the Early Nizari Isma'ilis', *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 30 (1992), pp. 91–97.

20. F. Daftary, 'Hasan-i Sabbah and the Origins of the Nizari Isma'ili Movement', in his *Mediaeval Isma'ili History*, pp. 181–204.

21. See, for instance, 'Ata-Malik Juwayni, *Ta'rikh-i jahan-gusha*, ed., M. Qazwini (Leiden and London, 1912–37), vol. 3, pp. 195–199; English trans., *The History of the World-Conqueror*, tr. J.A. Boyle (Manchester, 1958), vol. 2, pp. 671–673, and Abu'l-Fath Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-milal wa'l-nihal*, ed. W. Cureton (London, 1842–46), pp. 150–152; partial English trans., *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, tr. A.K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn (London, 1984), pp. 167–170.

22. See Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Fada'ih al-Batiniyya*, ed. 'A. Badawi (Cairo, 1964), and the Ismaili reply of 'Ali b. Muhammad b. al-Walid, *Damigh al-batil*, ed. M. Ghalib (Beirut, 1982), 2 vols. See also H. Corbin, 'The Isma'ili Response to the Polemic of Ghazali', in Nasr, ed., *Isma'ili Contributions*, pp. 67–98. Now also see F. Mitha, *Al-Ghazali and the Ismailis* (London, 2001).

23. For the history and doctrines of the Nizaris of the Alamut period, see Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* (The Hague, 1955), especially pp. 41–61, 121–139, 160–246, and Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 324–434.

24. On the doctrine of the *qiyama*, see *Haft bab-i Baba Sayyidna*, ed. W. Ivanow, in his *Two Early Ismaili Treatises* (Bombay, 1933), pp. 4–44; English trans., in Hodgson, *Order of Assassins*, pp. 279–324. See also Juwayni, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, pp. 222–239; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 686–697; Hodgson, *Order of Assassins*, pp. 146–159; Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp. 385–391, and Ch. Jambet, *La grande résurrection d'Alamût* (Lagrasse, 1990).

25. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Rawdat al-taslim*, ed. and tr. W. Ivanow (Leiden, 1950); ed. and tr. S.J. Badakhchani as *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought* (London, 2005); French trans., *La Convocation*

d'Alamût, tr. Ch.Jambet (Lagrasse, 1996), and al-Tusi's *Sayr va suluk*, ed. and tr. S.J. Badakhchani as *Contemplation and Action* (London, 1998). See also H. Dabashi, 'The Philosopher/Vizier: Khwaja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and the Isma'ilis', in Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History*, pp. 231–245.

26. Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 263–280.

27. See A. Nanji, *The Nizari Isma'ili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Delmar, NY, 1978), pp. 50–96; W. Ivanow, 'Satpanth', in Ivanow, ed., *Collectanea*, pp. 1–54; Ali S. Asani, 'The Ismaili *ginan*s as Devotional Literature', in R.S. McGregor, ed., *Devotional Literature in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 101–112; his 'The Isma'ili *ginan*s: Reflections on Authority and Authorship', in Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History*, pp. 265–280; reprinted in A.S. Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia* (London, 2002), pp. 82–99, and C. Shackle and Z. Moir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans* (London, 1992), especially pp. 3–54.

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